United Nations A/62/PV.66

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

66th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 11 December 2007, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim .... (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children

Agenda item 66

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The President: As members are aware, the Commemorative High-level Meeting will evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action contained in the final document of the special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A World Fit for Children" (resolution S-27/2, annex).

Ladies and gentlemen, and children from across the world, I welcome you all to this High-level Commemorative Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the special session on children. I was a delegate myself at that special session in 2002. When I returned this year, as President of the General Assembly, the session began with a video message from the children of my country. Why? Because there is nothing more important that the future of our children and young people. They are the next generations of leaders.

It gives me great confidence in this Organization when we tackle issues that cut to the core of that for which we stand, when we evaluate how well we have done, once declarations and plans of action are adopted and delegates return to their capitals.

We have a responsibility to set an example and stand up for what we believe in so as to ensure that we pass on to our children a better world, a safer, cleaner and more equal world.

Climate change draws these strands together. If we do not address this growing threat, instability will increase and the environment will deteriorate; the world's poor will be left struggling to build a better life for themselves and their children. Overcoming climate change requires a unique and continuous commitment. It means thinking ahead, and, at the same time, acting now. It requires an international resolve that captures the essence of the United Nations global mission.

We are already committed to these goals. At the 1990 Summit for Children, world leaders endorsed the principle that States should always act in the best interests of the child and that children should have a first call on resources. Again, in 2000, they committed to achieving specific targets by 2015 on children's education and health as part of the Millennium Development Goals. And in May 2002, at the General Assembly's special session on children, Governments promised to create a world fit for children as a bridge to a world fit for all of us. The General Assembly also devoted considerable attention to reviewing progress

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

made in eliminating violence against children at its sixty-first and sixty-second sessions.

The year 2007 is a milestone for the world's children. It marks a rite of passage for the Convention on the Rights of the Child — its 18th birthday. Today and tomorrow, we have an opportunity to celebrate the important progress that has been made, but we also have a responsibility to achieve the goals we set for ourselves.

The Secretary-General's report offers a mixture of hope and concern about the situation of children around the world. I would like to commend all Member States — over 140 so far — that have submitted national reports on their progress towards the goals of the special session. These reports provide an assessment of the situation of children in each country, as well as future commitments to overcome the challenges that remain.

I would also like to commend the many regional bodies and civil society and private sector organisations, in particular, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies that have implemented initiatives to make the world fit for children. Unless the long-term investment in children is made, humanity's most fundamental long-term problems will remain unresolved. If we are serious about our collective promises, then we have a great responsibility to deliver on them for our children. As every parent knows, the worst crime is to mislead your child. Empty promises lead to empty souls.

I am optimistic that this plenary meeting, the round tables and the many side events will deepen our inter-generational dialogue as well as further our commitment to make the world a better place for all our children.

The Assembly will now hear a message, via video, by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I am sorry I could not be with members for this meeting on the rights and well-being of children. I am in Bali for the United Nations Climate Change Conference, where we will also be addressing the needs of succeeding generations.

The special session on children in 2002 was truly special in many ways. It was the first devoted exclusively to children. It was the first to be attended by both children and heads of State or Government. It culminated in the adoption of a landmark document entitled "A World Fit for Children".

This new agenda was written for, and with, the world's children. It included 21 specific goals and targets for promoting healthy lives, providing quality education for all boys and girls, and protecting children from abuse, exploitation and HIV/AIDS.

At this year's Commemorative Meeting, I have the honour of presenting a new document entitled "Children and the Millennium Development Goals". It is my first comprehensive report on the MDGs as they relate specifically to children.

I am delighted that, once again, children and young people are joining the General Assembly. Some of them were involved five years ago, others are from a new generation helping to ensure that the nations of the world live up to the promises they made in 2002.

May these young people's engagement inspire you in your deliberations. Together, in Bali and in New York, let us work to make a lasting difference for succeeding generations.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Dalius Čekuolis, President of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Čekuolis (Lithuania), President of the Economic and Social Council: I have the honour to address the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. This meeting offers a unique opportunity to review how well we, as Member States, have worked with other partners to realize the goals in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at that twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly held in May 2002.

One of the clearest lessons over the last five years of striving to achieve welfare for children has been the importance of partnerships. Neither Governments nor non-governmental organizations, neither international organizations nor local communities can fulfil the needs of children by working in isolation. We have to collaborate and work together, even while we assume different responsibilities.

The Economic and Social Council has considered and is continuing to consider issues that are very much related to the world that we are building for our future. In the 2007 substantive session, Council member States reflected on the theme of strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development. That topic encompasses two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Council considers that, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259), since 2003, there have indeed been remarkable partnerships and collaborative efforts to accelerate action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the benefit of children. Significant progress has been made since the special session on children — in the promulgation of new and better laws, in the formulation and execution and more focused public policy and in realizing development outcomes for children. The adoption of strategic policy instruments and cost-effective essential services for children is also on the increase worldwide.

In the past five years, strong collaboration among international players, notably by special funds and agencies has yielded much fruit. I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative for their efforts aimed at fighting HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, spreading education and eliminating violence and related crimes vis-à-vis children. I am also honoured to say warm words to the more than 3,000 non-governmental organizations that are accredited to the Economic and Social Council. A large number of them are active in building welfare for children worldwide. I thank them all for their partnership.

Yet, there are huge gaps in achievement: between difference regions of the world, at the country and provincial levels and in terms of gender. We will have to be firm in eliminating violence against children, combating HIV/AIDS and promoting education accessible to all. To some extent, problems faced by the world's children are rooted in inequality and injustice and a failure to extend to all children the rights and protections that are enjoyed by some. Running through all the patterns of injustice is the persistent reality of gender discrimination, which denies millions of girls equal rights to health and opportunities. It also renders them vulnerable to sexual and other forms of violence.

At the current session, the ten-year strategic review (A/62/228, part two) of the Machel study on armed conflict (A/51/306) reminded us of the changing and devastating impact of conflicts on children.

Regrettably, there are alarming indicators that overall official aid for children-related activities is dropping and that local economies have failed to provide full employment for their young people. The need for children to benefit directly from the development of new vaccines and advanced treatment for many childhood illnesses is obvious. Another major hazard for the years ahead is climate change. The scale of future global warming may be uncertain, but the process is already under way, threatening the prospects of millions of children.

As with climate change, globalization can sometimes lead us in unforeseen and dangerous directions. But it still holds the promise of new forms of progress and protection. Globalization is also associated with rapid technological change. For children, the potential benefits lie in information and communication technologies, which are unlocking vast stores of previously inaccessible human knowledge.

Collective efforts and renewed commitment are required to address the challenges of the future. The Economic and Social Council is committed to continuing to provide a forum not only to discuss the problems but also to share best practices in that respect. With the interest and cooperation that it receives from Member States, the Economic and Social Council has been seized of many challenges that we face in our countries. I am confident that we will pursue these issues vigorously to ensure a great future for children and to make the planet truly a world fit for children.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. Veneman (United Nations Children's Fund): As I begin, I want to express our deep concern about the bombings in Algiers this morning and our sincere condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives or who have been injured.

It is an honour to participate in the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children on this day, the day that marks the sixty-first anniversary of the founding of UNICEF. We welcome the involvement of key partners, including the member organizations of the global movement for children, many other non-governmental organizations, sister United Nations agencies, academia, foundations and many more. Over 90 young people from around the world have been involved in shaping this special meeting, and they are making their voices heard.

In 2002, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S/27-2). Governments committed themselves to a set of time-bound and specific goals and actions in four areas for the well-being of children: promoting healthy lives; providing quality education; protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV and AIDS. Those commitments reaffirm and complement the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals as a framework for development.

We welcome the report (A/62/259) of the Secretary-General on children and the Millennium Development Goals, which was presented this morning. The report provides information and analysis on how far we have come, but also on how much further we need to go.

Progress is being made. For the first time since data have been collected globally, deaths of children under age 5 have dipped below 10 million, to 9.7 million. The rate of under-five mortality has declined 60 per cent since 1960. Community-based integrated health programmes have helped to drive progress — programmes that provide immunizations, vitamin-A supplementation, insecticide-treated mosquito nets and other key health and nutrition interventions. They also help to educate mothers on the importance of exclusive breast feeding and personal hygiene.

The data also indicate that HIV prevalence is declining in some sub-Saharan African countries, that more children, especially girls, are in primary school today than ever before, and that a growing number of children are registered at birth. Good and reliable data to monitor progress help to drive results. Measurable and sustainable outcomes based on the best available data are the foundation of UNICEF's approach in accelerating progress for children. Good data inform decisions about investment choices and priorities and about policies and programmes to deliver the optimal results, even with limited resources. When data are collected and analysed, targets are set, outcomes are measured and successful policies and programmes are scaled up, results and impact follow.

The 1990 World Summit for Children and the widespread adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provided hope and renewed commitment and helped to drive progress and shape the agenda for children. Increasingly, there is a global culture that embraces children's rights as central to the advancement of humankind. The youngest members of society must be protected from violence, abuse and the worst forms of child labour. Last month, we marked the eighteenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We all play a part in upholding the rights of, and achieving results for, children, with the Convention providing the framework and the Millennium Development Goals setting measurable benchmarks.

But if we are to create a world truly fit for children, we need to reach the millions of vulnerable girls and boys around the world whose lives continue to be impacted by poverty, hunger and abuse. That 9.7 million children die every year before their fifth birthday is simply unacceptable, especially since most of these deaths are from preventable causes such as disease and malnutrition. Worldwide, it is estimated that over 1 million boys and girls continue to be caught in the commercial sex trade and that hundreds of millions more have experienced some form of sexual violence. Many children suffer from violence at home, in their communities and in institutions. Over 90 million children continue to be out of primary school today. Each year, thousands of children are injured or killed by landmines or unexploded devices. Children continue to serve as soldiers in the conflicts of adults. And violence and rape are still weapons of war.

During a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I met women who had been brutally violated, including an orphaned girl. She was savagely beaten and raped by four men. She was 12 years old at the time. I often refer to that girl when I talk about the children I have met in my travels, because her story was so powerful and so painful — and all too common. These rapes must be stopped. We owe it to her and the thousands more like her who carry the physical and emotional scars — and who continue to be at risk.

In the coming months and years, starting with the reaffirmation of our commitments at this meeting, we must intensify our efforts to address challenges and create healthy, safe and protective environments for children. In a message from the youth representatives delivered at the town hall meeting hosted by UNICEF yesterday, we were eloquently reminded of how we need to tap into each other's comparative strengths to get the best possible results. Young people are not the sources of the problems, we were told, but they are resources to help solve them.

As the 2015 deadline for reaching the Millennium Development Goals draws near, we need to approach our task with a collective sense of urgency. We owe it to the millions of girls and boys who continue to live on the margins of the world's progress. As UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Audrey Hepburn once said, there is no deficit in human resources, only a deficit in human will.

The President: Members will recall that, in resolution 61/272, of 29 June 2007, it was decided that a girl and a boy would address the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting at its closing meeting. However, in my letter to Member States of 6 December 2007, I proposed that one of the children speak at the opening meeting. If there is no objection, and without setting a precedent, I shall take it that the General Assembly agrees to hear a statement by a child delegate at this opening meeting.

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to child delegate Longeni Matsi, a young gentleman from Namibia.

Mr. Matsi: My name is Longeni Victorious Matsi, and I am from Windhoek, Namibia. I have currently been working on a programme for children, made by children, on radio. It is called Uitani Childline Radio. We are discussing, we are educating and we are giving advice to children who are very strongly challenging the bad decisions that they confront. I am now going to read to the Assembly a text that has been prepared by all the children.

Ninety-three young people — 37 boys and 56 girls — aged 11 to 18 and representing 51 countries, despite our 20 different languages, are united for one cause: to create a world fit for children. Five years ago, children like us spoke for the first time in the General Assembly. They presented a document called "A world fit for us". Since then, we young people have been taking action to make that world: a world fit for us.

We have raised our voices and taken responsibility for those issues that directly impact us. We are becoming increasingly involved in forums and organizations, such as children's parliaments, which allow for a free environment for children to learn about their rights and express their opinions. We have fought for equality in all aspects of gender, age, ability, race and religion. We believe that our rights are universal — including for boys and girls, minority groups and indigenous peoples.

We undertake projects in our home countries that benefit a wide variety of children. We take various actions to combat issues such as malnutrition, child trafficking and HIV/AIDS, including in countries affected by disaster, conflict and war. We denounce all forms of child exploitation, violence and abuse against children. We need to establish and maintain those partnerships between young people and those who can ensure that rights are being enforced.

Promises were made in 2002, and we are eager to hear from you about what has been achieved and what still is needed to be achieved. This Meeting is a time for honesty, real action and meaningful change to end poverty and discrimination, to educate our children and to fight disease. This is the time for us to come together. This is the time to listen to our words not only with your ears but also with your hearts. There are no better people to consult on children's rights than children themselves. Together we can continue building a world fit for us.

The President: Before proceeding, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to a number of organizational matters pertaining to the conduct of the meeting.

First, with regard to the length of statements, in order to accommodate all the speakers inscribed on the list — and the list is very impressive, as I have 141 speakers inscribed on it — I urge speakers to adhere to the five-minute time limit for their statements, on the understanding that that would not preclude the distribution of more extensive texts. I appeal to speakers to cooperate in this respect.

Also, in order to assist speakers in managing their time, a light system has been installed at the speakers' rostrum, which functions as follows. A green light will be activated at the start of a speaker's statement. An orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes. A red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni on behalf of the Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino.

His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Captain Regent Tomassoni (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, the Republic of San Marino would like to express its concern regarding the tragic events of this morning in Algiers. We would like to associate ourselves with the expressions of grief for the victims in Algeria and the United Nations.

The Republic of San Marino, with the presence of its Captains Regent at this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children, has intended to accept the invitation extended by the General Assembly to participate at the highest possible level, in the knowledge that this event is important in view of the examination and assessment of the outcome of our countries' activities vis-à-vis the principles and commitments set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in the document entitled "A world fit for children", adopted at the twenty-seventh special session in 2002.

The Captains Regent most sincerely congratulate the United Nations on its hard work since then to affirm and defend children's rights through its bodies and specialized agencies, primarily the United Nations Children's Fund, which has undoubtedly achieved positive results. Indeed, the statistical data demonstrate the effectiveness of that work and give us a reason for hope for the future.

With regard to the fundamental principles stipulated 18 years ago in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, subsequently, by the two Optional Protocols, there is still an urgent need for prompt and adequate responses in order to affirm the right of human beings to a dignified life, to a family, to education, to a healthy and harmonious development on the physical and intellectual levels, in a safe environment, without the threats that still jeopardize the lives of children and the integrity of their personalities in many parts of the world.

Children are still suffering the devastating effects today of conflicts that have, unfortunately, almost doubled over the past 10 years and in which they are even used as child soldiers and are subject to the most abhorrent forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. We must all consider such treatment as absolutely unacceptable.

For this reason, it is essential to spare no efforts in trying to overcome this intolerable situation, first within our national borders and, at the same time, by increasing our support to international cooperation and the development goals for all human beings, as established in the Millennium Declaration. Together with public institutions, volunteer associations also significantly contribute to the achievement of this goal. In our country, volunteers play a particularly important role in raising public awareness and involving the population in solidarity and development projects.

In San Marino, children constitute about 19 per cent of the population and effectively enjoy the rights provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which have been integrated into the San Marino constitutional order and translated into a wide range of health, education, legal and cultural safeguards, from birth to 18 years of age. Nevertheless, new forms of malaise, discrimination and violence constantly threaten the growth and conscious development of children's and young people's personalities, including in the most economically and socially advanced societies. Constant attention must be paid to these phenomena.

Indeed, the comfort level achieved by these societies, including, indisputably, San Marino, as well as the rights ensured and the assistance provided, must not divert our attention from the dangers that indifference towards children and young people may cause. In fact, adults often pay greater attention instead to the superficial aspects of existence. Young people left alone, without attention and straightforward educational guidelines and without ideals and spiritual values, are indeed easy prey for many destructive phenomena. We must, therefore, join our efforts in the fight against these phenomena, which increasingly constitute a further obstacle.

Indeed, over the years, the attention and commitment of States and organizations have progressively extended from the protection of children by adults to the full affirmation of children's specific rights. This implies that respect for children's identity goes hand in hand with respect for their cultural values and traditions, a sine qua non for building peace. This concept inspired the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, which will end in 2010.

It is in this spirit that, last October, our country, after joining similar United Nations instruments, acceded to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Moreover, after the adoption in recent years of a long series of legal measures in support of the family, San Marino is developing new legislation on international adoption and child protection in order to supplement and update existing legislation.

We believe that this special meeting and the exchange of experience and other contributions at the interactive round tables will provide a renewed momentum to our determination and will strengthen solidarity and cooperation for the protection of the rights of children and young people.

There is a strong link between the work of the General Assembly and this year's special events devoted to environmental threats, promoting dialogue and understanding among peoples and, finally, protecting children and young people, who should represent the best part of the present and our common hope for the future. Thus, the United Nations has demonstrated once again the timeliness and importance of its role in promoting dialogue and cooperation among all States.

We express our most heartfelt appreciation for this appeal and the momentum that it has created, bearing in mind that our participation in this important event will help to strengthen the solemn commitment undertaken by newly elected Captains Regent, who, upon their investiture every six months, pledge, in keeping with statutes dating back to the 1600s, to pay particular attention to the weakest groups in society and to protect children's rights.

The President: I thank the Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino for his statement.

Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, to address the Assembly.

President Touré (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to express my heartfelt congratulations and thanks to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and to all those who have contributed to the holding and, in particular, the good organization of this meeting to consider in depth the implementation of the resolutions of the special session on children, five years after the adoption of our common vision, "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex).

I am particularly pleased to have been invited to this meeting because of the special, personal and affectionate relationships that I have with the children of Mali and with many other children throughout our continent. These children do not even call me by my full name, preferring a much more affectionate form: they call me by my initials, "A.T.T." These children, who give me their sincere friendship, call me their great friend.

I want to tell them, from this universal rostrum, that I, too, need their friendship. That friendship is a very great commitment, in the sense of the vision to which I have committed myself. Thus, I appreciate this meeting to review the process aimed at building a world fit for children — a process that is both visionary and based on the realities in our countries. In particular, I hope that it will lead to results that will enable us to maintain a synergy of actions benefiting children.

The common African position adopted in Cairo in May 2001, "An Africa fit for children", which forms an integral part of the Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children", was the object of a midterm review in Cairo five years later, from 29 October to 2 November 2007. The Conference of African Ministers responsible for Children, meeting on that occasion, adopted an appeal for accelerated action to ensure the survival, protection, development and participation of children for the period 2007-2012.

In that context, I should like to share with the Assembly a few lessons drawn from African experience. The status of the implementation of commitments for a world fit for children, in Africa and in Mali, has enabled us to make the following observations. There has been a substantial rise in school attendance rates, a strengthening of the capacities of public health facilities and an improvement in access to drinking water. With regard to the fight against HIV/AIDS, real progress has been made through increased awareness among our people, access to free anti-retroviral drugs in certain countries, such as Mali, and better care of AIDS orphans.

In the same spirit, thanks to the commitment of our heads of State and Government, greater attention has been accorded to protecting children in African countries from all forms of violence, abuse, negligence and exploitation and to shielding them from social vulnerability by strengthening the legal framework and through the promotion, ownership and defence of children's rights. We can also say that actions to combat child trafficking are now being carried out within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States, which together decided upon and signed a subregional agreement and agreed on a joint plan of action.

However, despite the progress made over the past five years in Africa, it must be recognized that children today are still vulnerable and increasingly affected by political, economic, cultural and social transformations and situations. The factors helping to worsen the situation of children on the continent and to jeopardize efforts to guarantee their protection, survival and development include poverty, conflicts, disasters, HIV/AIDS, abuse and child exploitation. Those are challenges that both States and the international community must overcome in order to offer children better chances in life.

We must renew our commitment to promoting the well-being of African children. We should be pleased that our States are increasingly aware of the fact that investing in children contributes to human development and economic growth as well as to peace and security. Some have said that one of the best ways to be generous now is to invest in the future. To invest in the future is to invest in children, who are both our present and our future.

In implementing these policies, we should place particular emphasis on participation, so as to promote the potential of children, adolescents and young people. Involving children in decisions that will affect their lives and the future of their communities and of society in general is essential in shaping the adults of tomorrow.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Mali expects the draft declaration that we will be adopting here following this meeting (A/62/L.31) to live up to the commitments to which 69 heads of State or Government and 190 national high-level delegations subscribed in May 2002, in order to move together towards making the changes that we want to see for our children, in a spirit of international solidarity.

My dear friends the children, together we can build a world fit for children.

The President: I thank the President of Mali for his statement.

Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Jozefina Topalli, Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania.

Ms. Topalli (Albania): Allow me to join with others in offering my condolences regarding the tragic events in Algeria.

It is a special honour to participate in this extraordinary event. Over the past few decades, human rights and human development issues have become key aspects of international relations. Although the two areas have generally been treated separately, the need to bring them together and to relate one to the other is becoming increasingly clear. Human rights — the set of principles that define and protect the human dignity of all people — are binding norms of behaviour for those States that subscribe to them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a tool for advocacy that can be used to enhance human development and that gives people the ability to live healthy, creative lives as active members of their communities. Attention to these two related areas can change the lives of a country's most vulnerable citizens.

In Albania, one third of the population is under 18 years old, and 17 per cent of Albanians are between the ages of 15 and 24. Women in their reproductive years — from 15 to 49 years — comprise up to a quarter of the total Albanian population of 3 million.

The protection of children's rights has been one of the most important focuses of social policy development in Albania since 1992. The rationale for this shift in policy derives from the fundamental principles of the constitution of the Republic of Albania, United Nations conventions, the Stabilization and Association Agreement signed last year with the European Union and other international instruments ratified by the Albanian Government.

The protection of human rights in general and of children's rights in particular has been improved as a result of continuous legal and institutional reforms aimed at meeting European standards and achieving integration. The Albanian Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. In 2001, the first National Strategy for Children was approved. In June 2005, the National Strategy was revised, and the National Plan of Action for Children for 2005-2010 was approved.

We all know that parliamentarians or members of legislatures are key to the implementation of the General Assembly's Plan of Action (see resolution S-27/2, annex). In that regard, I would like to briefly present a few significant achievements and efforts made in recent years to fulfil all our commitments in these areas.

In order to ensure quality education for children, our Ministry of Education and Science increased the duration of compulsory education for children. The high school enrolment rate of students from ninth year classes is 80 per cent. To ensure teaching materials for pre-university education, an important and ongoing process, the budget was doubled in 2007. Educational funding increased from 3.1 to 4 per cent of gross national product, and investment in this field has tripled.

Universal access to basic education and the completion of primary education by the world's children is one of the most important of the Millennium Development Goals and of "A world fit for children". Overall, in Albania, about 92 per cent of primary-school-age children are attending primary school. There are no relevant differences between urban and rural areas: the figure is only 1.6 per cent higher in rural areas.

At the national level, there is no disparity between male and female primary school attendance. Furthermore, 91.2 per cent of children of primary school age — from 6 to 9 years — are attending primary school and 98.9 per cent of children of low secondary age — 10 to 13 years — are attending low secondary school. Sex differences in attending primary education are almost non-existent. A positive correlation between the level of a mother's education and household wealth may be observed. The percentage of children attending elementary school increases from 89.4 per cent to 96.8 per cent as the mother's education increases from primary to secondary and higher education.

With respect to literacy, the vast majority of the female population over the age of 15 in Albania is literate: 98.8 per cent. Literate women include those who are reported to read either easily or with difficulty. There is no significant difference between women from households in different economic categories — 98.6 per cent of women from the poorest families and 100 per cent of women from the richest families are literate.

With regard to health care, Albania presents an obligatory vaccine scheme against major preventable childhood diseases, namely diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, tuberculosis C, poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, haemophilius influenzae infections, hepatitis B and hepatitis. In 2006, mumps and haemophilius influenzae vaccines were introduced into the routine compulsory scheme. Vaccine coverage for 2006 for all vaccines was 98 per cent.

With regard to assistance at delivery of babies, the guidelines for good maternal health provide that all women should have access to basic maternity care through a continuum of services offering quality antenatal care, clean and safe delivery and postpartum care for mother and infant, with a functioning referral system linking the whole. In Albania, the administrative figures reported by the Albanian Institute of Statistics show that in 2005 approximately 99 per cent of births were assisted by skilled personnel.

With respect to the promotion of good health in children, at the end of 2006, the Albanian parliament adopted a law against smoking in public places. This law prohibits smoking in schools, the sale of tobacco to children under 16 years of age, tobacco advertising at public events and sponsorship by tobacco companies of youth activities. The law entered into force on 27 May 2007 and was accompanied by a broad campaign with numerous public health inspections to ensure compliance.

The Albanian parliament recently adopted a specific law against violence in the family. We have also ratified a series of laws on children's rights, including, in particular, a law on the Republic of Albania's accession to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

With regard to children with limited abilities, the Albanian Government pays special attention to that group of society. It is for that the reason that we have tripled pensions for people with limited abilities. As a promoter of the implementation of the relevant law adopted by the Albanian parliament, I recently employed two youngsters belonging to that group.

A few days ago, we organized the Albanian parliament's day against family violence, a special high-level plenary session to combat domestic violence that included the participation of the Prime Minister, non-governmental organizations, diplomats and nearly 130 successful women representatives from various spheres, including the arts, culture, politics and civil society.

Two days ago, we opened a children's exhibition in our parliament building dedicated to combating domestic violence that included more than 200 child participants. I have brought with me some of their pictures, as well as genuine and heartfelt messages to the Assembly and to all of us. Please allow me to share with you the real message that Albania's children have sent to the General Assembly and the entire world: "Stop violence! Stop domestic violence!" That is the most sincere message that Albania's children can send to all parents, parliamentarians and people with power throughout the world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. André Rouvoet, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Youth and Families of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Rouvoet (Netherlands): The more vulnerable people are the more they need legal protection. That is especially true of children. The international community must therefore not let up on its efforts to ensure that children enjoy their rights to proper nutrition, health care, education, sanitation and safe drinking water, as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). That is why we are here. And that is why the Netherlands will work actively towards those Goals.

Last February, the new Dutch Government adopted youth and family issues as a priority in national policy. The policy programme under the theme "Every opportunity for every child" was explicitly based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A recent UNICEF report ranked Dutch children as the happiest of 21 wealthy Western nations, followed by the children of Sweden and Denmark. We are grateful that children in the Netherlands are happy and contented with their lives. Eighty-five per cent of children in the Netherlands are doing well, but not everything is going well. Ten per cent of our children are at risk and 5 per cent have problems. They are neglected, kept out of school or even abused. They have criminal records and behavioural, alcohol or drug-related problems. They suffer from obesity, making them more likely to contract diseases.

As Minister for Youth and Families, it is my task to provide the positive conditions for children's development, so that the lives of the 85 per cent will remain happy and the lives of the other 15 per cent will be improved. We cannot do that only by investing in the young people in question. We also have to invest in their families.

In recent decades, policies aimed at family life have been somewhat neglected. We believe it is time for the family to be fully recognized as the basic unit of society, and as such to be strengthened by the Government. A safe and healthy family life is of crucial importance for the well-being of children and of society as a whole. In other words, when the family flourishes society will flourish. I therefore want to set up easily accessible youth and family centres in every town in the Netherlands, where parents and young people can find help and advice close to home.

Of course, the Government ought to be reluctant to interfere in parenting matters. It is parents who are responsible for children's upbringing in the first place. If they cannot cope, and if the community fails to support them, professional care and assistance must be provided, primarily aimed at encouraging or empowering them to assume their responsibilities. But when, and only when, the development of the child is endangered, the Government has not only the right but also the duty to intervene. Interventions can range from forcing parents to accept help to — as a last resort — transferring the child to a foster family. We want children to grow up in a safe environment, to achieve their potential and to contribute to society, especially those coming from the most disadvantaged families. The Dutch Government recently introduced an additional income-related child allowance.

In international forums too, children's rights are a Dutch priority. We shall continue to lobby for such rights, especially the right to a proper education and the right to grow up in a safe environment, free from violence.

Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro's study on violence against children (see A/61/299) will help the United Nations to better address difficult and sensitive issues such as corporal punishment, sexual abuse and the worst forms of child labour. I applaud the decision of the Third Committee (see A/C.3/62/L.24/Rev.1) to recommend the appointment of a special representative on violence against children. I can assure the Assembly that the Netherlands is only too happy to help other countries develop and introduce plans to combat violence against children.

We have actively lobbied within the European Union for the speedy adoption of the guidelines on children's rights, so that they will occupy a more prominent place in the Union's foreign policy. The General Affairs and External Relations Council adopted those guidelines yesterday.

The Netherlands is also involved in a number of bilateral initiatives. For instance, we will fund the translation of a child-friendly version of Mr. Pinheiro's study into the languages of countries willing to implement its recommendations. Moreover, the Netherlands will step up its efforts to combat child labour. It will pursue an integrated approach that combines political instruments with investment in education, poverty reduction and public campaigns.

Both the United Nations study on violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1) and the one on violence against children, both published in 2006, make it clear that girls are particularly vulnerable to all kinds of violence. We believe that more needs to be done to ensure that this particularly vulnerable group gets sufficient attention. The Netherlands has therefore decided to organize an international conference in 2009 on combating violence against children, particularly girls. We intend to do that in close cooperation with the United Nations. The aim will be to promote international action to stop violence against girls and to enhance the resilience of girls. I will make sure that the Assembly is informed in good time about the structure and organization of the conference.

Ms. Hepburn (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In 2002, the children's statement at the General Assembly's special session on Children ended with the following words: "You call us the future, but we are also the present" (A/S.27/PV.1, p. 9). That is why we need to take action now.

The central goal of the Dutch youth and family programme is to contribute to a country where children can grow up safe and healthy, develop their talents, enjoy themselves, learn to be good citizens and be properly equipped for the future. In essence, that is also the aim of the 2002 Declaration and Plan of Action (resolution S-27/2, annex). Only when we as international community reaffirm our commitment and reinforce our efforts will we be able to achieve our goal: a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Somsavat Lengsavad, Standing Deputy Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the National Commission of Mothers and Children of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Over the past five years, although some considerable achievements have been registered on every target of the implementation of the Action Plan of A world fit for children, slow progress and challenges continue to persist. One of the main challenges currently faced by the least developed countries is the lack of financing in practical terms.

As far as the Lao People's Democratic Republic is concerned, our Government has given great importance and attention to the follow-up of the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" by adopting methods and programmes in each area, which are being implemented with gradual success. Concerning the implementation of the right for child survival, our Government has accorded top priority to mothers' and children's health-care activities by placing immunization programmes as a key element for mainstreaming primary health-care activities and other activities related to mothers and children.

The Government has also organized an annual national immunization campaign for mothers and children with the incorporation of vitamin A supplements and de-worming procedures with a view to eliminating measles by 2012. Recently, this campaign was held on 9 November 2007 with the participation of the head of State and other high-ranking officials of the Government. Furthermore, our Government has set regulations on water quality control for ensuring clean water. In 2005, a total of 67 per cent of households had access to clean water.

On child development, our Government has placed education at the centre of this activity. In this context, the National Assembly has adopted laws and important measures such as the law on the protection of the rights and interests of children and the amended law on education. The implementation of our education strategy by 2020 and the National Plan of Action on Education for All have also been vigorously pursued. To provide wider access to education for children of all ethnicities throughout society, the Government has expanded ethnic schools and joint learning programmes involving both handicapped and non-handicapped children. So far, the net primary school enrolment ratio is 86.4 per cent.

On child protection activities, the Lao Government has fully implemented the principles and provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by according greater importance to children's care and protection from various risks such as abuse, persecution, the use of forced labour and sexual exploitation. Moreover, my country has also become a party to International Labour Organization Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.

In addition, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is also a party to two Optional Protocols of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Currently, the Government is formulating a national action plan on combating child trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

To promote children's participation, the Lao Government has created enabling conditions and opportunities for children and young people to take part in various social activities both inside the country and overseas to exchange views on issues of common concern. Furthermore, the Government has encouraged children and young people to foster cultural exchanges on the fine traditions of the nation and of our different ethnicities by educating them to preserve and transcend that common heritage while cultivating a decent and progressive lifestyle.

The Plan of Action of A world fit for children is widely recognized as a tool for realizing the Millennium Development Goals, especially the Goal related to the promotion and protection of children. Like other developing countries, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has achieved some significant progress in implementing this Action Plan, but poverty and lack of funds remain a major challenge.

To complement the efforts made by each developing country, I would therefore like to call upon the international community to exert more efforts in fulfilling their obligations through the allocation of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product as official development assistance to the developing countries.

I wish to reaffirm the Lao Government's steadfast commitment to collaborating with the world community for the cause of A world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Constance Simelane, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

Ms. Simelane (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland is classified as a lower-middle-income country with an estimated gross domestic product per capita of $1,500. However, 60 per cent of the population lives below the poverty datum line, while 37 per cent lives in extreme poverty. The socio-economic profile of the country shows that we have been faced with HIV/AIDS, poverty and climatic change leading to drought and environmental degradation.

The 2006 draft census report estimates a population of 1 million people, of which approximately 50 per cent are children. There is also an increase in the number of child-headed households. Drought is another factor that has increased the risk for already vulnerable communities. Over 40 per cent of the people in Swaziland are now facing acute food and water shortages. Swaziland has embarked on programmes for the provision of grants to the elderly and children as well as farm inputs in an effort to cater for the poor.

These efforts are necessary to promote the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural development of children so we can create a Swaziland fit for children, a Swaziland striving progressively to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Swaziland Government, in an effort to harmonize domestic laws with the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has made amendments on certain pieces of legislation. These amendments include the adoption of the Constitution Act of 2005 as the supreme law of the land, a number of provisions of which deal with protecting and promoting the rights of the child; the amendment of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, which has facilitated the establishment of the intermediary service and Children's Court; the commissioning by the Government of Swaziland of the drafting of the Children's Act and Child Justice Bill; the development in 2007 of Ministry of Health and Social Welfare guidelines and standards for the operation of orphanages and for children living in institutions or homes; and the establishment of a special unit within the Ministry of Justice with 14 prosecutors to deal with child abuse and domestic violence cases.

The Government has also established institutions to address children's issues at various levels. The National Children's Coordinating Unit was established under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office. This unit seeks to ensure that children are protected from all forms of abuse, and that they are supported and raised without discrimination. The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Children's Affairs was established in 2007 to support legislation on child protection. A Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offenses Unit was created within the Royal Swaziland Police. A Children's Court was also established within the High Court of Swaziland. A Children's Centre of Clinical Excellence — a special health facility for children infected with HIV — was established in 2005.

In addition to constitutional and legislative protection, we have implemented national policies aimed at improving the welfare and quality of life for children in Swaziland. These policies include a National Health Policy launched in August 2007, together with a National Strategy Plan, a comprehensive multi-year immunization plan for 2007-2011 now under development; the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan that was approved by the cabinet in 2006; and a National Policy for Children, including Orphaned and Vulnerable Children.

The National Plan of Action for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children was launched in April 2006. All relevant stakeholders were included in the development process, and the planned interventions focused on a child's right to protection, participation, food, basic services and education. The Plan seeks to ensure that children have access to shelter, education, water, food and protection from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, trafficking and loss of inheritance.

The Government of Swaziland has launched SwaziInfo, an adapted version of DevInfo, as a national monitoring tool for following progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other national priorities. Various programmes have been undertaken to track MDG targets.

Although HIV prevalence had dramatically increased over the years, it began to show a decline in 2006. The number of children living with HIV thanks to antiretroviral therapy is now increasing. In 2006, a total of 1,135 children living with HIV/AIDS were on antiretrovirals, and services to help prevent mother-to-child transmission expanded. In addition, quality family planning services were integrated in most sites. Neighbourhood Care Points are providing care, support and at least one meal a day to approximately 33,000 orphaned and vulnerable children.

The Tinkhundla Fit for Children initiative, a localized and adapted version of the "A world fit for children", has been in place in Swaziland since 2005. The initiative is rooted in the Swazi culture that requires communities and families to support and care for all children in one way or another.

Other legal initiatives include the a draft sexual offenses working document, which is designed to curb the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. The Ministry of Labour is engaged in a project on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. The project seeks to examine the extent of the problem of child labour in Swaziland and find ways to combat it. A Programme Advisory Committee on Child Labour, a multisectoral body established to coordinate issues relating to child labour, has been established.

I would like to conclude by mentioning that the establishment of the new National Children's Coordination Unit, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Children's Affairs and continued strong collaboration between the Government and civil society, United Nations agencies and other donors provide for an opportunity for improved advocacy and coordination for children's issues and a coordinated response. The year 2008 will focus on working towards ensuring the domestic application of international conventions that we have ratified, through dissemination efforts, implementation and monitoring of the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will also stress continued advocacy to ensure that draft policies, bills and guidelines are translated and passed into legislation.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Natalia Petkevich, Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of Belarus.

Ms. Petkevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): All children of the world cry in the same language. In that respect, they are absolutely the same. But at the same time, they are very different. Children are the mirror of the State. The way children are treated determines the moral state of society and the level of development of a State.

The Republic of Belarus was the first country in the post-Soviet State back in 1993 to adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The recommendations of "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) have been enshrined in our national strategy to improve the situation of children. It is significant that in the preparation of the strategy children themselves took part and they said what they wanted at the national and regional forums.

Starting in 1998, we have gradually been implementing the presidential programme entitled "The children of Belarus". The State provides care for all categories of children — healthy children, sick children, those that have parents, those who are orphans. Special State support is provided for talented young children.

We are particularly pleased that, since 2004 the trend in Belarus has been for an increased birthrate. There are more and more families with three or more children: a graphic reflection of our State policy to provide support for mothers and children, particularly for families with many children.

Belarus is among the countries with low infant and child mortality. For the last 10 years, the infant mortality rate in Belarus has decreased by half and is at the lowest level within the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Vaccination coverage is 99.2 per cent. Up to the age of two years, children are given free food. All children receive free secondary schooling. Eighty-two per cent of children study in free schools. There is a special category of children in Belarus, the children of Chernobyl, who were born and who live in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster. They are provided with special medical observation, annual clinical examinations, free meals in school, free boarding and treatment in health centres and sanitariums.

We are doing everything we can to ensure a barrier-free environment for children with special psycho-physical development needs. In order to achieve this we have drastically changed the approach to educating and raising such children. Instead of specialized boarding schools, we have introduced integrated education structures which allow for these children to live with their own families and to receive education together with ordinary children.

The existence of orphans is a great cause of distress for any State. The main task is to give them a new family or help them find a new home. Today in Belarus about 75 per cent of those children receive some form of family care, though that figure reaches 100 per cent in some regions of the country.

But social orphanhood is a more important problem. The phenomenon of "orphans" that have living parents is a disgrace to modern society. For that reason such children receive State support, and their so-called parents can be held responsible under the law, even criminal law.

There is another problem that deserves serious attention. As is known, the Republic of Belarus is actively promoting an initiative to improve coordination of international actions to prevent human trafficking. Especially alarming are the crimes that involve the trade in children and child pornography. The production of child pornography and its distribution on the Internet are occurring on a truly terrifying scale. We firmly believe that the General Assembly must definitely discuss the problem of combating the trafficking in children in the very near future as one of its thematic debates.

Today's meeting of the General Assembly is deeply symbolic for the Republic of Belarus because this year was proclaimed in our country as the Year of the Child. We must do everything we can to see to it that in all countries of the world the situation of children is constantly and very significantly improved. That will undoubtedly be helped by strengthening existing and creating new partnerships at the global, regional and national levels.

Accordingly, we welcome the fact that UNICEF bases its strategy for protecting children and improving their status on the premise of the "trinity of partners" — Member States, international organizations and civil society. In twenty-first century we must put an end to the shame of modern civilization — trafficking in children and their involvement in military conflicts. The Interagency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons should play a leading role in that process.

Children are our future. What world our children grow up in, in what they see around them and in what conditions their understanding of the world is formed will determine ultimately the future of our States and of the whole of humankind.

Let us unite our efforts to form a world not just fit for children. Let us build a world worthy of children and worthy of their future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Svetlana Inamova, Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan.

Mrs. Inamova (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to express sincere gratitude to the initiators and to the organizers of this very important event to assess progress made in implementing the declaration and plan of action contained in the document entitled, "A world fit for children". The Republic of Uzbekistan fully supports those documents and is making every effort consistently to implement the tasks contained in them.

In Uzbekistan, the protection of motherhood and childhood and the creation of conditions for comprehensive, harmonious development and education of children are intrinsic parts of our State policy. Uzbekistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 1992, and is purposefully working to implement the provisions of A world fit for children. In particular, we have worked out a strategy, priorities, national development goals and appropriate plans of action, as well as a system of protecting the interests of children, all of which have been modernized in accordance with the provisions of the document. We are focusing on the prosperity of children as a priority in our strategy for increasing the prosperity of Uzbekistan for the period 2007 to 2010. Together with UNICEF, we have worked out and are implementing a system of monitoring of prosperity goals for children. The main thrust of all of those plans of action is to improve the prosperity of children. The plans are clearly targeted to achieve success in implementing A world fit for children.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw the Assembly's attention to the efforts we are making in Uzbekistan for the prosperity of children in order to build a world fit for a happy, harmonious life for our children. A solid system of legislation has been established to protect the rights of children. In all legislative acts we have reflected the principle of keeping the child's best interests in mind. Most of the more than 90 normative legal documents relating to social protection include the rights of the child.

This year, we adopted a law guaranteeing the rights of children, which was prepared with the active support of experts from UNICEF. The rights of children have been enshrined in Government programmes, such as the State programme to reform the public health system, the national training programme and the State nationwide programme to develop education for 2004-2009.

In Uzbekistan, there are more than 5,000 active non-governmental organizations (NGOs), most of which deal with the problems of children, including the international non-governmental charity fund entitled, "For a healthy generation" and a non-governmental children's fund called, "You are not alone". Because of the variety of tasks involved that aim to guarantee the comprehensive interests of children, and also given the need for coordinated action by all NGOs in the Republic that deal with the problems of children, about 100 NGOs have set up a coalition to provide assistance for the protection of the rights and interests of children. In 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan set up a coordinating board for the prosperity of children that includes senior officials from ministries, departments, voluntary organizations and international organizations.

The Republic is implementing measures to ensure the birth and education of healthy children beginning with the formation of a healthy young family. All medical services for children are provided free of charge. A great deal of work is being done under the programme entitled, "Mother and child screening", which seeks to prevent the birth of children with congenital diseases involving mental impairment, as well as the screening of pregnant women to detect fetal abnormalities. We are cooperating with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other partners to implement the mother and child protection programme, in particular the Universal Immunization Programme, the Health and Family Life Education Programme, the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness, the improvement of reproductive health and prevention of iron and iodine deficiencies among others. In 2003, a joint UNICEF-JICA programme was started to prevent mother and child anaemia. That programme covers some 2.5 million children. We have also started planning a national flour fortification programme. In recent years, there has been a significant drop in maternal, infant and child mortality in our Republic. We are carrying out a strategic anti-HIV/AIDS programme for 2003-2006, and we have developed a new State programme for 2007-2011.

Particular attention is devoted to social programmes. Several important State programmes and decrees are in place on themes such as the family, a healthy generation, mother and child, ecology, motherhood and childhood and goodness and compassion.

Upon the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, 2007 was proclaimed a Year of Social Protection in Uzbekistan. The Government of our Republic has confirmed a State social protection programme within which measures have been taken for further improvement of the situation of children, giving them all-around support and strengthening the legal mechanisms that protect their rights. Fifty-three per cent of the State budget is devoted to social programmes. At 99 per cent, our literacy level is among the highest in the world.

The amount of money from our budget that we spend on education has increased by a factor of 2.6. Over the past three years, we have built more than 250 new schools in Uzbekistan. We are planning to build more than 100 middle schools and 900 vocational colleges. This will make it possible to fully make the transition to a compulsory 12-year education programme. There are 90 specialized pre-schools for children, and we want to have an inclusive education.

We have established some special State awards for talented children in spheres such as literature, art, culture, education and science. We have a children's sport fund, which is headed by President Karimov. More than 400 sports schools are functioning, together with a Special Olympics Organization. In 2007, Uzbekistan held a Special Olympics for countries of Central Asia, Poland, Afghanistan, Turkey and the Russian Federation. More than 450 mentally challenged children took part in those games.

In conclusion, I assure the Assembly that Uzbekistan will continue to make every effort towards the consistent implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in "A world fit for children".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Alima Mahama, Minister for Women and Children's Affairs of Ghana.

Ms. Mahama (Ghana): I extend my condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria regarding the tragic events that occurred in Algiers today.

I am honoured and privileged to deliver this address on behalf of His Excellency President John Agyekum Kufuor, Chairman of the African Union (AU) and President of the Republic of Ghana, who, as current AU Chair, was mandated by the second Pan-African Forum on Children, held in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, to present to the Assembly our call for accelerated action on the implementation of the Plan of Action on an Africa Fit for Children.

I am pleased to report that Africa has prepared for today's Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting. As part of our preparations, we met in Cairo, under the sponsorship of the African Union Commission and with the collaboration of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. I am pleased to report that the meeting noted a number of significant achievements and much progress made in all of our countries in the promotion of child survival, protection, development and participation.

For instance, accelerated programmes for child survival and the adoption of social security measures for vulnerable groups has helped to reduce infant mortality and to enhance the life chances of children in several countries. Awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention is high, and preventive measures have been intensified. Mother-to-child transmission has been reduced by 25 per cent in several countries. In the area of protection, there is greater awareness and recognition of various forms of abuse, exploitation and violence against children. Many countries have passed laws against child trafficking and other harmful practices, as well as instituting juvenile justice systems to protect children.

Much as we were pleased to record some measurable progress for our children, the Cairo review meeting was also concerned that the targets set in the Plans of Action for an Africa fit for children and a world fit for children are yet to be attained. The meeting identified a number of challenges. These include the gaps between policy and practice; high levels of absolute poverty; very high levels of neonatal mortality; persistent malnutrition among our children; low school completion and high drop-out rates; involvement of children in armed conflict; and low participation of children and youth at all levels.

In the light of the slow progress and challenges, AU member States, represented by their ministers, as well as civil society and all children's representatives, strongly reaffirmed Africa's commitment to redouble its efforts to achieve the target of the Plans of Action of an Africa fit for children and a world fit for children. We have committed ourselves to priority areas, including legislative policy and institutional development, mobilizing and leveraging resources, enhancing children's life chances, overcoming HIV/AIDS, realizing the right to education, protection and participation, as well as establishing monitoring and evaluation measures to monitor our activities and outcomes.

There is a side event at 1.15 p.m. today in the Economic and Social Council Chamber, and I invite representatives to participate so that we can elaborate on the call for accelerated action. Time will not allow me to spell out the details of the call, but permit me to highlight just a few.

We committed ourselves to accelerate legal reform; allocate sufficient budgetary resources for our children; scale up minimum packages of proven childhood interventions based on successful strategies such as the accelerated child survival and development programme; support family-based and community-based actions that enhance children's wellbeing; scale up universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention; scale up programmes for prevention of mother-to-child transmission; ensure universal access to comprehensive basic education, especially early childhood care and other pre-school programmes; create a safe and enabling environment for our children's participation; and promote and implement multisectoral programmes to end violence on the continent.

I am happy to inform the Assembly that at the Pan-African Forum in Cairo, the First Lady of Egypt, Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, launched a fervent appeal to all African countries to end female genital mutilation. The ministers of Africa responsible for child rights and welfare accepted and endorsed the appeal and committed themselves to take steps accordingly as a matter of urgency.

Please allow me to share a bit of Ghana's experience. Ghana's achievements in the area of early childhood development, child health and progress towards universal school enrolment are success stories that we would be proud to share in the course of the present meetings, round tables and side events.

Through the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, we have established a centralized management and coordination system for the effective implementation of our early childhood development policy, and we have established national, regional and district level bodies to promote and monitor implementation of these programmes.

Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS is an integral part of the national antenatal care and delivery programme, with free health care service coverage for pregnant women and children below 18 years once they have registered under the national health insurance scheme. Annual national campaigns on integrated child and maternal health, comprising immunization, distribution of free insecticide-treated bed nets and vitamin A supplementation have been institutionalized, and I am happy to announce that no child in Ghana has died from measles in the last four years. We are also on course to be certified as a polio-free country.

Ghana has enacted many legislative tools, including a human trafficking law and has developed a comprehensive national plan of action to implement the law. A cross-sectoral Human Trafficking Management Board and a Human Trafficking Fund have been established, and we have multilateral and bilateral cooperation agreements with neighbouring countries to effectively combat trafficking.

Having conducted research on violence against children, we have started the process towards developing a national plan of action on violence against children. On this note, permit me to congratulate the United Nations and its Member States for the great achievement of having decided to establish the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children.

Africa hereby reaffirms our commitment to achieving the targets of the various plans of action. In this regard, we are gratified that this high-level meeting includes children from around the world, including Africa: we have brought children as members of our teams. We hear their voices in the children's forum. This meeting is about them and therefore must include them. We congratulate all the children for their commitment to make the world better fit for them.

On behalf of the current Chairman of the African Union, His Excellency President John Agyekum Kufuor, I present to this High-level Plenary Meeting the African position paper on a call for accelerated action on the implementation of the Plan of Action towards an Africa Fit for Children 2008-2012.

Ms. Bethel (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

While acknowledging the kind support of the international community, UNICEF and all our development partners, we invite the Assembly to join us to effectively respond to that call. Africa's children cannot wait. At the Cairo meeting our children said, "No more resolutions without solutions".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to The Honourable Claire Hepburn, Senator, Attorney-General and Minister of Legal Affairs of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Ms. Hepburn (Bahamas): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

We assemble here over the next two days clearly to assess the vital goals we made in 2002 and the progress achieved in advancing the well-being and development of children, as set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), adopted at the twenty-seventh special session, on children. The States members of CARICOM welcome this opportunity and reaffirm our commitment and support for the full implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action. We also extend our support to the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and its funds, programmes and agencies in the protection and promotion of the rights of children.

We commend the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and note the proposed appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. Although some of the recommendations of the study on violence against children (A/61/299) may not be in concert with traditional practices and customs of rearing children and may be interpreted as usurping parental authority, nevertheless, we pledge our support for that appointment and for the mandate.

We are often in danger of trivializing the truism that children are the most important asset to the future development and survival of our planet. As the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, adopted on 30 September 1990, states,

> "There is no cause which merits a higher priority than the protection and development of children, on whom the survival, stability and advancement of all nations — and, indeed, of human civilization — depends". (*A/45/625, annex, p. 19*)

Seventeen years later, continuing abuses make this fact an even greater imperative for action. It is, indeed, important to record the positive side of the ledger. However the ledger will only be truly balanced when the negative side reflects that no child in any country is emotionally or physically harmed or is disadvantaged.

In terms of the positive side of the ledger, we can be justly proud of the fact that the concept of children's rights, based on this Organization's near unanimous ratification of the landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child, has had an enormous impact and has catapulted children's issues to the forefront of every agenda and major debate of this Assembly.

The dawn of the new millennium in 2000 saw the world community pledge its commitment, through the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, to bring hope for a better and more equitable world to millions of the less fortunate, including children. In 2002, this pledge was further concretized by promising the children of our world a better and brighter future free from malnutrition, preventable diseases, poverty, violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, forced labour and armed conflict.

CARICOM recognizes that a lot has been done and applauds the achievements in the years since 1990. We have seen a decline in global mortality rates for children under 5 years of age, which fell below 10 million in 2006 for the first time. The fight against preventable diseases has led to drastic declines in measles and polio infections. There has been improved access to safe water. We have witnessed improvement in early childhood development. We also commend the significant increase in primary school enrolment levels by some countries, as they strive to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015.

We can list many achievements in issues affecting children around the world and can be proud of the progress in our respective regions and countries. In the Caribbean region, we are on track to achieve four of the Millennium Development Goals, in the areas of poverty reduction, universal primary education, increase in gender parity in primary education and reduction in child and maternal mortality. Our region's significant achievements in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS are also praiseworthy. Additionally, some of our countries have developed plans of action on children and have implemented national child protection legislation that aligns national laws with international standards.

The Caribbean has also taken initiatives to reduce child labour, as was noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/62/259), submitted for consideration during the sixty-second session.

We commend the work of UNICEF and its Executive Board towards the approval last June of the four-year multi-country programme for the Eastern Caribbean, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. This programme will contribute to the support of public policies and investment that reflect the rights and priorities of children, increase protection, advance early childhood development, promote healthy life skills to reduce violence and prevent HIV/AIDS infection through scaling up the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) programme. We look forward to the Agency's ongoing efforts and pledge the Region's full cooperation and support.

Five years later, we have arrived at a critical juncture. In assessing our progress in the implementation of "A world fit for children", where are we? Have we done enough to protect our children or are we on a path to witness yet another decade of great promises and modest achievements, like that of the 1990s?

While we recognize that progress has been achieved in some regions and countries, others are witnessing levels of progress too slow to meet our collectively agreed goals. In some cases, the situation has stagnated or worsened. If these circumstances are not reversed, then by 2015 an additional 4.6 million children will not survive to the age of five years, with sub-Saharan Africa being the most severely affected.

Today, 20 million children are severely malnourished and suffer from various preventable diseases. The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains a global threat to the development, progress and stability of our societies. Exploitation of children is pervasive in all our societies, and violence and abuse against children remain a serious challenge. In this area alone, our efforts have not generated sufficient progress, and the results are mixed.

CARICOM is committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. Yet, like many other regions, we too are facing a number of challenges. Our region is characterized by socio-economic vulnerabilities and susceptibility to external economic factors. CARICOM heads of Government, therefore, in cooperation with the Community's ministerial councils such as the Ministerial Council on Human and Social Development, and through regional partnerships such as with the Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS, are working diligently to develop effective social policies to address many of the challenges confronting the region, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS, which is a major and pervasive threat to the survival of our young people in the future generation.

A world fit for children is a just and peaceful world. However, we cannot create a just and peaceful world if we do not, as a matter of priority, correct the growing inequities in income and the global trade regime which has negatively impacted small and vulnerable economies of the Caribbean.

If we assess our progress from the economic perspective, then it is clear that we have not done enough since 2002 and that we are not on track. I would say that the same is true if the analysis is done from a social development perspective. If we do not take all necessary measures now to address the pervasive, socio-economic disparities and challenges confronting developing countries, we will fail to provide a better and brighter future for our children.

The children of the world cannot wait and hope for us to do what we pledged to do in 1990 at the World Summit for Children, in 1995 at the World Summit for Social Development, in 2000 at the Millennium Summit and in 2002 at the twenty-seventh special session, on children. The time has come for us to strengthen both national resources and the capacity of developing countries' delivery systems to enable them to provide more effective basic social services, critical for children's survival, in line with the 20/20 initiative. We must improve technology and capacity-building for the collection, monitoring and analysis of quality data to support policy decisions and national development plans; we must create broader and more focused partnerships; and commitments from the international community must be increased and must bear fruit.

Official development assistance is still far short of what is needed for us to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to provide essential investment in children. CARICOM, consequently, again calls on the international community and donor partners to take positive steps towards meeting the target of 0.7 per cent. CARICOM, equally, reiterates the call made by the Secretary-General, for donors to issue timelines for scaling up aid, in order to reach the targets by 2010 and 2015.

Finally, we cannot sufficiently underscore the critical need for successful conclusion of the Doha trade negotiations, which will go a long way in helping to meet national goals and objectives and thereby fulfil the promises we made to our children. Let us commit ourselves. Let us again say yes for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Antonio Milososki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Milososki (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): First of all, I will use the opportunity to express, on behalf of the Macedonian people, our deepest condolences with regard to the tragic terrorist events that took place in Algeria today and, on behalf of the Macedonian Government, the strongest condemnation of those violent acts.

We have gathered here to evaluate the progress achieved in the implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action (resolution S-27/2, annex) adopted at the special session on children of 2002 and to reaffirm our strong political commitment to making the world a place fit for children. Despite the remarkable positive developments inspired by this global process, guided by our desire to further protect the rights and well-being of children worldwide, many serious obstacles and challenges remain ahead of us.

Children in some regions are more negatively affected than in others. That requires our collective mobilization. The reinvigorated joint efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are of crucial importance to the process of investing in children and guarding the best interests of the child. Inspired by this global process, Macedonia has made enormous efforts to improve the situation of children in our country. We have also joined forces with our regional partners, States and regional organizations in making a Europe fit for children.

My Government took an active part in a number of important regional conferences with the aim of contributing towards the achievement of the global goals set forth in the documents of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly. These regional events reaffirmed the commitments of States undertaken globally in 2002 and recognized the importance to systematically measure the extent to which the rights of the child are effectively implemented and to establish comprehensive self-monitoring structures to measure and evaluate the achievements.

Let me briefly present the Macedonian experience in the implementation of the commitments of the special session on children of 2002. Last January, the Macedonian Government submitted a national progress report. The report was facilitated by a special event held in Skopje in June 2005 on the theme "A Country Fit for Children", organized by the Government of Macedonia and the UNICEF country office. This conference, the first of its kind in our region, brought together Government officials, mayors, experts, civil society members, academics and youth representatives to discuss children's issues. Its aim was to galvanize political commitment and accelerate action for children in Macedonia by ensuring that children's issues remained high on the political agenda of the country.

Our major achievements are: elaboration of the National Action Plan on Children; establishment of the National Commission on Children, the Parliamentary Working Group on Children and the Sub-Committee against Trafficking in Children; an improved reporting record on the Convention on the Rights of the Child; as well as ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention.

We have managed to decrease infant and mother mortality rates, to establish child-friendly hospitals and to reform the education and child protection system, and we have succeeded in eliminating iodine deficiency. We have a very committed civil society sector working on the promotion and protection of the rights of children in Macedonia.

Let me share a summary of lessons learned in the preparation of the national progress report and the initiatives undertaken since 2002. The obligations the Republic of Macedonia assumed under the document adopted in 2002 have triggered the wide mobilization of national capacities and resources in order to meet the set goals. The process of drafting and adopting the National Action Plan on Children, inspired by the world Plan of Action (see resolution S-27/2, annex), has increased the attention to children's needs and focused the activities of political decision makers. As a result, a number of important legislative and institutional reforms have taken place.

The problem of coordination will be overcome with new institutional structures, in particular with the establishment of the National Commission. Insufficiently developed budget planning has challenged the implementation of the National Action Plan and the world fit for children targets. Therefore, the Government wants to improve data collection and analysis. The identified shortcomings will serve as a basis to upgrade our policy in the area of the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

The Macedonian Government is convinced that investment in children is the most valuable and rewarding investment in our common future. As such, it must remain a top priority for Governments and their partners. Our global movement to create a world fit for children must not be discouraged by setbacks, but further inspired by the visible progress achieved.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ana Ligia Mixco Sol de Saca, First Lady and National Secretary for the Family of El Salvador.

Ms. Mixco Sol de Saca (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address this world forum to reaffirm the commitment and the political will of the Government of El Salvador to continue implementing the principles, goals and strategies agreed upon in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, and entitled, "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). That session was called to renew the commitment to the health, development and dignity of children worldwide. This goal draws us here today to review the progress achieved by countries in fulfilling those commitments.

The special session on children brought together the commitments undertaken in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, at the World Summit for Children and at the Millennium Summit. El Salvador identified itself with these endeavours and responsibly endeavoured to overcome the challenges to building a world fit for girls, boys and teenagers.

Poverty is one of the main obstacles to the effective protection and promotion of all of the rights of our children and their well-being. That is why one of the main goals of the El Salvador Government plan is the implementation of poverty eradication programmes. In this regard, I am proud to indicate that, in connection with meeting the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, the targets related to the percentage of inhabitants with an income of less than one dollar per day and the incidence of extreme or critical poverty have been met.

But challenges remain, and we have successfully implemented the presidential Solidarity Network programme, which takes care of 200,000 families living in the poorest towns in rural El Salvador. This programme provides food, education and health care, empowers women and promotes gender equality, especially given the crucial role of women in strengthening the family and society as the main guides and guardians of children. Our aim is to comply with the relative poverty goals by the year 2015.

Through our National Secretariat for the Family, an institution over which I am honoured to preside, we have directly contributed — in coordination with other national entities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector — to meeting in recent years the challenges in health and education. Health is one of the main human development indicators, which is why it has high priority on the Government's agenda. This has allowed us to reach the goal of reducing the infant mortality rate, which has dropped to 24 per 1,000 live births and the child mortality rate, which has fallen to 6 per 1,000 live births.

All the children of El Salvador are entitled to universal and cost-free access to immunizations against diseases such as tuberculosis, tetanus, poliomyelitis and measles. With respect to the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we have strengthened health care services and systems through the effective and reliable supply of medications. One hundred per cent of pregnant mothers who so request are entitled to a free HIV test. This national strategy has resulted in a more than 85 per cent reduction in the number of children born with HIV.

We are convinced that one of the main tools to combat poverty is education, and we have developed actions to attain the goals of reaching universal primary education and eliminating gender disparities in education, through access of girls to education at similar or higher rates than boys. One of the tools for continued progress in this area is the Healthy School Programme. This is part of the Government's social policy and directly benefits more than 800,000 children living in the rural and marginal urban areas of the country, leading to their comprehensive well-being.

Our commitment to a world fit for children also entails the implementation of the Programa Ternura, or Caring Programme, begun in May 2006, which integrates inter-sectoral institutional efforts, with the support of the United Nations system. Our goal is to contribute to human security and enhance the living conditions of the Salvadoran families, particularly the living conditions of children, within the framework of the promotion, care, protection and advocacy of all of their rights. In that manner we uphold the Millennium Development Goals.

El Salvador has adapted its current legislation to the standards set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. We have also implemented a national policy for the comprehensive development of children and adolescents. This is a fundamental instrument to fulfil our regional and international commitments.

In the Declaration and Plan of Action "A world fit for children", United Nations Member States committed themselves to making the greatest effort to reduce and eliminate all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, discrimination and disparities against children and adolescents. To that end, we have taken various steps and put in place programmes aimed at strengthening the family and promoting the values of unity, respect and peaceful coexistence.

Allow me to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of my husband, President Elías Antonio Saca, to make every effort to achieve the universal well-being of our girls, boys and adolescents. This

High-level Plenary Meeting provides us an opportunity to deliberate jointly and to listen to the voices and points of view of girls, boys and adolescents with regard to all the issues and problems that affect them by virtue of their age and level of maturity. The momentum provided by this Meeting will, in the near future, enable us to feel satisfied about our progress in the short and long term. We are all responsible for the well-being of children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Moushira Khattab, Secretary-General of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Mrs. Khattab (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express our heartfelt sympathy to the people of Algeria on today's bombings in Algiers.

Five years replete with developments have passed since the 2002 special session on children, whose outcome document (resolution S-27/2, annex) was entitled "A world fit for children". Experience has shown that our effective implementation of that document, along with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, can make a huge difference and can help to create a world more fit for children. As a whole, those two documents stand out as landmarks in addressing children's issues. However, despite the unprecedented international consensus generated by those documents, they cannot be implemented in isolation from a third critical document, namely, the independent expert's report on violence against children, transmitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General (A/61/299). Egypt contributed significantly during the preparation of those documents, and we have taken serious and pioneering steps to implement them at the national level and to adopt and promote them at the regional and international levels.

Many initiatives at the national level have been launched in Egypt, with strong support from its political leadership. The result has been that a rights-based approach has become a fact of life in my country. We are now working to ingrain such an approach in the minds of all Egyptians.

Egypt has withdrawn its reservations to articles 20 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We no longer have any reservations to any of the Convention's articles. We will continue to promote the full implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols.

In that regard and in implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Egypt has made great strides in reducing mother and child mortality rates. We have also completely eradicated poliomyelitis and tetanus contracted at childbirth and introduced the right to Egyptian nationality for children born to an Egyptian mother and a foreign father. On the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has launched a girls education initiative that has been considered a huge success by the international community. That programme is a model partnership between Government, civil society and seven United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, primarily UNICEF. In just three years, more than 800 schools have been built to educate thousands of girls. That experience led the expert Ronald Sultana, who was appointed by UNICEF to document the Egyptian experience, to say that it was a unique, inspiring initiative for education that had created a new generation of schools for a new generation of women — women who are educated and empowered, opting for their deserved place in society as partners in development on equal footing with men.

That ambitious strategy was solidly reinforced through steady funding by the Egyptian Government to address all issues related to childhood, primarily education, health, social integration and capacity-building. This pioneering experiment was implemented through a child-oriented budget.

As part of the same rights-based approach, Egypt has also made a significant breakthrough witnessed by the entire world: a drastic drop in the prevalence of female genital mutilation, which is now a criminal act under our laws. That practice is also condemned by the public and is no longer a part of the dominant culture. With the support of civil society, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has led a campaign to raise awareness among local communities and to mobilize public opinion against the practice. The participation of children and young people has been remarkable and strong. That has paved the way for change through a campaign under the theme "The beginning of the end", which was launched by First Lady Suzanne Mubarak. The campaign, which is gaining ground every day and which benefits from strong political and executive will, led to the second

Pan-African Forum on Children, which is part of Egypt's effort to end female genital mutilation in Africa. That effort includes an ambitious African plan focused on the advancement of African children.

On the basis of a rights-based approach to children's issues, we have redoubled our efforts to eliminate child labour, which violates a child's right to education and protection from violence and commercial exploitation. Moreover, it has become clear that having to live on the streets is in itself a violation of a child's rights, including the right to live within a family that provides protection, and to receive social services. In that connection, we are tirelessly attempting to expand services for disabled children and those with special needs. The issue of violence against children has also become a crime punishable by law. We have been working to adapt our legal code in that regard through a partnership process led by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, the Egyptian Government and civil society. The aim is to ensure that children enjoy all the rights stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To that end, we have raised the age for consent to marriage from 16 to 18 years for girls and the age of responsibility for a criminal act from 7 to 12 years of age. We have also made available all necessary care for children born out of wedlock. We have criminalized corporal punishment, female genital mutilation, trafficking in children and child sexual exploitation. We have also introduced a new juvenile justice system that is in line with the 10-year review of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is based on justice reform, not punishment.

Egypt has made enormous efforts at the Arab and African levels, among which I would like to mention the following. In May 2001, Egypt hosted the Pan-African Conference on the Future of Children. In July of the same year, we also hosted a high-level Arab conference on the subject. Those meetings produced an Arab and African perspective in preparation for the drafting of "A world fit for children". In addition, Egypt also hosted this year's second African conference devoted to the five-year review of that document and a meeting that adopted an Egyptian initiative on Africa's role in the review of the document. Africa is proud to be the first continent to make such an effort. We have come to this High-level Plenary Meeting to urge accelerated efforts to implement the plan of action to make Africa fit for children that was introduced earlier today by Ghana's Minister of Women and Children's Affairs on behalf of the African Union.

Given the close link between women's and children's rights, Egypt is engaged on issues related to global and regional peace and security. In that connection, the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement has been established to promote peace and to empower women as peacemakers and as advocates for peace and security on behalf of children.

In the context of the 2006 study on violence against children (see A/61/299), Egypt has played a pivotal role as Chair of the steering committee for the Middle East and North Africa. We have hosted three conferences devoted to launching a regional dialogue on the study. That has led to an important achievement: the setting up of basic infrastructure to prohibit violence against children. This includes, among other things, the establishment of national committees to fight violence, the drafting of strategies, plans of action and monitoring mechanisms to monitor violence, the setting up of hotlines to save children and the establishment of offices to receive complaints.

The Egyptian National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has translated the complete study into Arabic and has distributed it in the Arab world, as the Arab world believes that that is an important step towards its implementation. We will host a follow-up Arab conference to be held at Arab League headquarters next month.

In closing, we understand that the road is still long, but what we have achieved on the national, regional, African and international levels supports our conviction that we are on the right path and that our efforts are not being impeded by a lack of awareness or will.

Let us agree to work together in close international cooperation and real partnership for a better future for our world, and for broad understanding that we are one world, where no minority must enjoy security, stability and peace without seriously taking into account the enormous majority that is dying of hunger, thirst, illiteracy and disease.

Let there be peace for all, as well as justice, stability and security. Let there be peace for our children — always and everywhere.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Nasha, Minister of Local Government of Botswana.

Ms. Nasha (Botswana): In addressing the Declaration and Plan of Action on "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), Botswana made a time-bound commitment based on the eight agreed goals for children and young people. All the activities, objectives and targets pertaining to the Declaration on "A world fit for children" have been incorporated into our national and district development plans, in conformity with our National Vision 2016.

Botswana ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2001. We are committed to upholding child rights as stipulated in the Convention and consistent with the principle of the best interests of the child for Botswana's current and future children. In our effort to harmonize our domestic laws with the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions, we reviewed our country's Children's Act and as a result a more comprehensive children's bill is currently being drafted with the help of UNICEF-Botswana.

Other pieces of legislation which have been amended include, among others, the Marriage Act, which was amended to raise the age of marriage from 16 to 21 years for both boys and girls. The Marriage Act further makes the registration of all custom-based and religious marriages compulsory, in order to guard against early marriages for girl children.

Registration of births and deaths has been compulsory in Botswana for many years now. What we are now endeavouring to do through the Children's Act Amendment Bill is to make it mandatory for all children to have the names of their fathers written on their birth certificates, irrespective of whether or not those fathers are married to the mothers of those children. The issue here is that every child has the right to an identity.

Prior to the advent of HIV/AIDS, Botswana was well on course towards eradicating tuberculosis and significantly reducing child, infant and maternal mortality. Botswana's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS are well documented in the report of the Executive Director of UNICEF. This disease has indeed reversed our fortunes over the years. Over and above our documented efforts to save the lives of those infected with HIV/AIDS and to prevent the infection of unborn babies, the focus of attention has now turned to preventing the spread of the disease. The fact that more and more young people undergo voluntary testing for HIV/AIDS offers a glimmer of hope for the survival of future generations in our country.

Botswana's biggest area of concern in connection with Millennium Development Goal 2 has to do with the provision of early childhood education and learning. Only 17 per cent of pre-school-age children have access to early childhood education, and the majority of those children come from middle and higher income families who can afford the fees. Otherwise, primary education has been free to all for some years now.

We have taken concrete steps through legislation and public education to guard against early marriages and all forms of violence against children.

We owe it to our children to make this world a safe place for them. In this regard, nothing, not even culture or customs, should be used as an excuse to violate children. As a woman, I know best that culture has been and continues to be used widely as an excuse to marginalize women. But we are old enough to speak out for ourselves. On the other hand, most of these children cannot do the same. They need us to speak out for them and with them, to ensure that they are protected against all forms of abuse and exposure to harmful practices which we have to do away with sooner rather than later.

We need to mount a serious and open education campaign to end the practice of female genital mutilation and impress upon Member States the need to introduce laws that will deal with the problem convincingly. And I believe that our menfolk should be meaningfully involved in this campaign so that it will not be viewed just as yet another situation of women crying in the wilderness. The practice has no clinical value. It is not sanctioned by any religion. All it does is inflict unbearable pain on young girls and subject them to lifelong trauma and depression.

In an effort to realize children's right to participation, we in Botswana envisage, in our draft

Children's Bill, the establishment of a national council which will oversee children's issues at the national level. The Bill also provides for the establishment of the Children's Consultative Forum, which will be led by children's representatives from all districts. We are determined not to make the Children's Consultative Forum a token entity. We will endeavour to use the Forum to meaningfully consult children on all decisions that affect them, starting with the draft Children's Bill itself. It will be the duty of the National Children's Council to ensure that the Forum is convened on a regular basis. This requirement is indeed included in the law in order to make sure that the Forum is convened regularly and stays focused. An annual report on its work will be submitted to parliament by my ministry.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Government of Botswana, I would like to thank our stakeholders, such as the civil society organizations, development partners and the private sector, for their unwavering support on children's programmes and projects.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Marlene Mungunda, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare of Namibia.

Ms. Mungunda (Namibia): Namibia too would like to join those who expressed their condolences and solidarity to Algeria for this morning's tragic events.

It is a special honour for my delegation to be accorded this opportunity to address the General Assembly on this very important topic — children — an issue that is of great concern to all Member States. The report of the Secretary-General before us (A/62/259) shows that many countries have taken concrete steps to make this world a better place for children in the fields of health, nutrition, education and protection. That is a very encouraging development indeed.

At the outset, I should like to thank the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their thoughtful remarks and to express my appreciation for the voice of the African boy, who called for honesty and real action and who asked us to listen with our hearts.

The Namibian constitution enshrines the rights of children to life, health, education and a decent standard of living. The Government of the Republic of Namibia is signatory to a number of international instruments and conventions, which shows the seriousness of our commitment to safeguarding the nation's future leaders and citizens. We have adopted the Combating of Domestic Violence Act, the Child Maintenance Act, the Combating of Rape Act and the Children's Status Act, and the Child Care and Protection Bill will be introduced soon.

We recognize that quality education directly contributes to human development, capacity and productivity. In that context, Namibia has made great progress in making education effective, compulsory at the primary level and accessible to all. Namibia is on the right track in its efforts to reach the global Millennium Development Goal target of universal primary education. Enrolment rates have been growing steadily since 2001. Gender parity, a hallmark of Namibia's primary education system, remains slightly biased in favour of female students.

Namibia has also made great strides in ensuring that orphans attend school. Therefore, primary education, in theory, is free for those who cannot afford it. Article 38 of the Education Act of 2001 provides that

> "All tuition provided for primary and special education in state schools, including all schoolbooks, educational materials and other related requisites, must be provided free of charge to learners until the seventh grade, or until the age of 16 years, whichever occurs first".

All primary and secondary schools implement HIV/AIDS life-skills programmes, which provide young people with facts about sexual health and reproduction, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, as well as attempting to improve their communication skills.

However, despite improvements in access to education, no external shock has as much potential to slow down or even reverse the recent gains in primary enrolment as the advance of HIV/AIDS. The epidemic's impact on students and educators is as complex as it is devastating. The school dropout rate as a result of the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other health factors is high.

The number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS also continues to grow. It is estimated that by 2021 Namibia will have more than 250,000 orphans, who will account for one third of its under-15 population. Three quarters of those children will have been orphaned by AIDS. As the number of AIDS victims continues to rise, an increasing number of children will grow up without parental love and care, deprived of their basic rights to shelter, health, food and education and facing the threats of violence, abuse and exploitation.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia has formulated national policies and strategies on HIV/AIDS, including the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children, which are being implemented with a focus on prevention, care and support. These programmes need additional resources if they are to be able to make a greater impact on our societies. Mitigating the socio-economic impact of the pandemic is another area that warrants further investment. The Government is providing social grants to orphans and vulnerable children on a monthly basis.

Finally, we believe in the important role that the United Nations system can play in safeguarding the interests of children everywhere. Indeed, Namibia believes in the common goal of creating a world fit for children and has integrated the commitments set out in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) into its existing national development programmes and poverty reduction strategies. Namibia is also continuously striving to achieve the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2).

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Göran Hägglund, Minister for Health and Social Affairs of Sweden.

Mr. Hägglund (Sweden): Today, children are living in a time of great change, opportunities and challenges. New phenomena are challenging children as well as adults. These days, children know much more and learn very quickly about what is going on around them — but also about things that are happening far away. They live in the real world and the virtual world at one and the same time. It is our responsibility to make sure that this enriches and brightens their childhood and does not instead shorten, complicate or threaten their safety or their very lives. Regrettably, many children in the world also face poverty, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and other forms of violence.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides important support for children in these times of rapid change. We see the Convention as a minimum level, a baseline. In many areas, we can achieve more. The goal of our welfare policy is to guarantee to all girls and boys a good start in life. The main responsibility for the care and upbringing of children lies with their parents or other guardians. Society has to support the parents so as to guarantee good and secure conditions in which children can grow up. The family is considered the primary unit of society, and parenting has an essential role for the future of society. A safe and healthy family life is of crucial importance for the well-being of children and of society as a whole.

It is important that decision-makers and other adults listen to children, take them seriously and make sure that they are included as much as possible in decisions that affect them. A good dialogue with children is something in which we engage far too rarely. We decision makers have a language of our own. We leave little room for children's questions or suggestions, and we rarely or never get back to children to tell them what we have done regarding their points of view. We still have much to learn in this area.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of taking part in a meeting of children's ombudsmen from all over the world. Sweden believes that children's ombudsmen have a very important role to play in enabling us to fulfil the joint undertakings that we made in 2002. We would like to encourage countries that have not yet established a children's ombudsman to take advantage of that option.

The Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals, the Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children" and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are cornerstones of Sweden's international development cooperation. That cooperation is based on a rights perspective and on the perspectives of poor people regarding their own development.

Development must be equitable and will not be sustainable unless children's best interests and capabilities are taken into account. All our development cooperation must place a greater focus on child protection and on girls' and boys' participation. Violence against children can never be justified and all forms of violence and abuse must be combated and must be prevented.

It has been against the law for almost 30 years in Sweden for parents to hit their children. Other countries, though regrettably far too few, have followed our example. The picture that emerges from the United Nations study is frightening. All over the world, children are still being subjected to violence and abuse. We must all act together to put a stop to all that. We must work for a shared vision of zero tolerance; no child is to be subjected to violence.

International organizations should encourage and help their member countries to abolish all forms of violence against children in all contexts, including in the family. Politicians, teachers, religious leaders, the mass media and opinion-makers should all contribute to abolishing the violence that affects our children.

Sweden welcomes the decision to appoint a special representative of the Secretary-General in the work to combat violence against children. We are convinced that the special representative will be able to coordinate efforts at the international level.

Sweden appreciates the work being done by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) around the world. The work of UNICEF is making a difference to children's everyday lives. We can all find valuable questions and useful answers in the down-to-earth studies that the Innocenti Research Centre produces in such a professional way. We also recognize with appreciation the work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and others that focus on promoting gender equality and combating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Much of the world will soon be celebrating Christmas and a new year – a holiday season characterized by generosity and hope for the future. Above all, it is a time for children. We politicians and decision-makers should keep the focus on children even after the holidays. We should constantly seek direct contact with children and ask them what we can do for them and what we and they can do together. Our vision is for every country to be a place where every girl and boy gets the best imaginable start in life.

Sweden will continue to be a trustworthy partner in our continued work to build a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Priya Manickchand, Minister of Human Services and Social Security of Guyana.

Ms. Manickchand (Guyana): We join with the rest of the international community in offering our heartfelt sympathies to the people and Government of Algeria and, indeed, to all humankind. We have seen yet another attack on humanity.

We also recognize the statement made by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs of the Bahamas on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

The delegation of the Republic of Guyana, which includes three children, is delighted to participate in this high-level meeting to review the progress of our collective efforts to create a world fit for children. On behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, I extend special greetings to all child representatives and commend them for their invaluable contribution to this year's review process.

The care, protection and development of all our children, in whom lies the future of humanity, are objectives that demand pride of place on our national and global agendas. Guyana stands committed to those objectives. We welcome the opportunity to share our experiences in implementation and to exchange ideas on the ongoing process of transforming our world into one fit for children.

Since the 2002 special session on children, the Government of Guyana has taken several initiatives to enhance the well-being of our country's children and to ensure that their rights are protected. We have succeeded in reducing child mortality, while increasing the immunization of children against vaccine-preventable diseases; immunization currently stands at 92 per cent. Success has been achieved in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, even as efforts have been enhanced in the provision and distribution, free of charge, of locally produced anti-retroviral drugs to those infected with HIV/AIDS. There are ongoing efforts to provide quality education to children in Guyana and, while we have achieved universal primary education, concentration is now focused on the attainment of universal secondary education and ensuring the completion of that grade of education by boys and girls alike.

The principle of the best interests of the child guides Guyana's jurisprudence as it relates to legislation on children. To date, we have enshrined in our Constitution the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides the framework for promoting healthy lives, combating HIV/AIDS, providing quality education for all and protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence.

It is disheartening to note the level of violence in many societies globally. For our part, we have embarked on a campaign to stamp out violence in our society, particularly violence against women and children. That matter is currently the subject of extensive national consultations on the basis of proposals by the Government to reform the law, strengthen protection and improve support and services to victims, while upholding the right of the defendant to a fair trial. Earlier this year, a Child Protection Service was established. The Government of Guyana continues to actively collaborate with UNICEF under the country programme of cooperation 2006-2010 to tackle child protection and welfare issues.

Implementing a world fit for children has not been without challenges and setbacks, some of which are greater than those occasioned by financial and infrastructural constraints. Children across the world are at risk of further suffering on account of the global increase in food and fuel prices and in the cost of living. With internal and domestic conflicts and wars among countries, the innocence and rights of childhood are stolen. More needs to be done to address the scourge of poverty. More needs to be done to protect children from exposure to conflict situations, as well as to provide for their rehabilitation and reintegration into post-conflict societies.

Preserving the natural environment for posterity is an important dimension of creating a world fit for children. As reports by the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change make clear, human actions are impacting the kind of world our children will inherit. Renowned economist Nicholas Stern has highlighted that those who will suffer most are the developing countries, which have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions.

Vulnerability can be considered in terms of geographic location and economy, as well as age. In the developed and developing countries alike, it is the children who are most vulnerable. Where climate change leads to disasters, destruction and death, children suffer the most. Many become orphans; many become disabled; many become displaced. Their health is affected, their education is affected, and their entire life is turned upside down.

Global warming and consequent climate change must be addressed. Guyana has taken a leadership role in that effort. Our pristine rainforest does much service to the world in terms of carbon sequestration. The post-Kyoto Protocol framework should make provisions for standing rainforests with mechanisms for rewarding countries for conserving those rainforests.

From this rostrum, we appeal to world leaders, and indeed all adults, to do everything they can to avoid the road to self-destruction and move our planet onto a path of recovery through massive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It will make little sense if we manage to eradicate violence against children on one day and they drown in a mighty flood or starve in a drought or famine on the next. We therefore stress the need for a coherent and comprehensive approach to issues concerning children.

Guyana looks forward to sharing further insights on its national experiences in the round table sessions in order to contribute to an elaboration of best practices with a view to establishing and sustaining a world fit for children.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations

A/62/PV.67

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

67th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 11 December 2007, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim .... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children

Agenda item 66 (*continued*)

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Viera Tomanova, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovakia.

Ms. Tomanova (Slovakia) (*spoke in Slovakian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): The 1990 World Summit for Children and the 2002 special session of the General Assembly on children identified the principles and goals necessary for creating good conditions for the lives of children. In 2002 Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his opening speech to the twenty-seventh special session, addressed the children of the world: "[W]e, the grown-ups, have failed you deplorably ... We, the grown-ups, must reverse this list of failures" (*A/S-27/PV.1, p. 3*). Even many years later, we still ask ourselves if we have achieved progress in our common effort to build a world fit for children. Is this world fit for grown-ups; more importantly, is it really fit for children? Are we grown-ups responsible in our behaviour towards children? That question is directed to all of us — politicians and citizens.

It is extremely satisfying that the lives of children are the focus of attention of such an institution as the United Nations. It is however regrettable that we have to deal with this question as a continuing and unresolved problem.

The Slovak Republic is aware of the significance and importance of protecting children's rights and has applied the goals and principles of the 2002 twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children. It has started to carry out changes in the country in order to improve the conditions and protection of the rights of its children.

The basis for the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the fact that children have to be protected in exercising their rights. During the period 2002 to 2007 Slovakia carried out reforms reflected in its legislation, especially in such areas as education, social security, health care, family law, criminal law, access to information and public administration. It is very important from the point of the protection of the rights of children that the National Plan of Action for Children has been adopted. The Plan is evaluated and updated every two years, the goal being to contribute to building a good system of protection of the rights and interests of children. In order to meet the tasks of the Action Plan, both State and non-State entities participated, and individual measures were identified so that the rights and education of children will be protected. Slovakia has also adopted both Optional

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Protocols to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the other on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

Children's rights are regulated in various types of legislation in Slovakia, including the Family Act, the act on the social legal protection of children and social guardianship, and the act on assistance in material needs. Slovakia's act on the social legal protection of children and social guardianship is creating a system of measures whereby the State guarantees protection and support to all children and families, especially in those cases when parents for various reasons are not able or willing to ensure proper childcare. The special characteristics of this legislation is its influence by family, civil and criminal law.

The relationship between the Act on social legal protection of children and social guardianship and the Family Act is particularly significant because the former regulates conditions which are the prerequisites for certain measures to be taken in the areas of social legal protection of children and social guardianship.

The legislation on the rights of the child is very important here because it is based on those rights accorded to children by the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The right of children to ask a relevant body, foreign assistance provider, municipality or accredited institution mandated to protect the interests of children goes beyond the responsibilities of those institutions. The right of the child is protected. Schools and providers of social care may be addressed. There is also an obligation for those relevant institutions to provide immediate assistance to children to protect their lives and rights. Furthermore, the legislation gives the right to children to ask for assistance without the knowledge of their parents or the persons responsible for their upbringing.

Regarding institutional care, one of the important areas of concern was to evaluate the condition of children placed not only in orphanages, but also in special boarding schools, re-education orphanages, crisis centres and children's homes. The application of this legislation has brought significant changes for children placed in institutional care.

The legislation has been positively evaluated, as the work undertaken on behalf of children has improved, as has the work with families. This has resulted in a decrease in the overall number of children placed in institutional care by court order. It is true that in some cases effective cooperation with municipalities has not been established, but municipalities' obligation to contribute financially to that care will no doubt improve their involvement.

Despite the endeavours and efforts of our country to protect the lives, health, rights and interests of children, we should not forget that in all undertakings benefiting children, we must always bear in mind that the best interests of the child should always represent the primary consideration in all such projects in order for every child to have the opportunity to develop his or her individual abilities.

I would like to underscore here that this theme is not only very important within the context of the United Nations, but also in the context of the Council of Europe, over which Slovakia is currently presiding. I would like to underscore our commitment to create a world fit for children in which sustainable human development takes into consideration the best interests of children and is based on the principles of democracy, equality, non-discrimination, peace and social justice, universality, inseparability, and the interdependence and interrelationship of all human rights, including the right to development.

We fully associate ourselves with the draft concluding declaration of this meeting (A/62/L.31), and are prepared to implement it. We are of the opinion that crimes committed against innocent children should be considered the most brutal and inhuman and that there should be zero tolerance regarding such violations of the law, as the repercussions for children are difficult to undo and represent a heavy burden for the child throughout his or her entire life. If we sanction other areas of society, we should also think of having more efficient measures to eliminate activities against those whom we should care for most — our children.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Esperanza Cabral, Minister of Social Welfare and Development of the Philippines.

Ms. Cabral (Philippines): At the outset, please allow me to express my Government's strong condemnation of the terrorist attack that took place in Algeria this morning, which left many people dead, including several United Nations staff members. The Philippines grieves for the people of Algeria, the United Nations and the families of the victims.

The message of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, was abundantly clear. Our children, while enjoying equal and inalienable rights as human beings, need special care and protection for the achievement of their full potential. We all answered that call, and today the Convention has become the most widely ratified international instrument, providing the framework for national and regional plans of action for children.

Five years have passed since the landmark United Nations special session on children, which created a common vision for "A world fit for children". Its outcome document, which complements the Millennium Declaration, is interlinked with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The ultimate objective is to create a child-friendly world where all children get the best possible start in life, have access to quality education and are afforded the opportunity to grow to their full potential. A child-friendly world is where the rights of children are respected, where democracy flourishes and where poverty is not an insurmountable barrier to human progress.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the agenda of "A world fit for children" are top goals of the Philippine Government, with the Government, the private sector, academia and the international development community having been working closely together to fulfil them since the year 2000. These same goals have been mainstreamed into the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan, 2004-2010, and in the National Plan of Action for Children, 2005-2010.

In the five-year period following the special session on children, new laws that benefit children have been enacted. These include the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003; the Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour Act of 2003; the Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act of 2004; the Newborn Screening Act of 2004; and the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006.

The Philippines has experienced first-hand the value of consolidated, concerted efforts and sustained interventions to improve the situation of Filipino children. The Philippines Midterm Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals shows the significant gains the country has made, which translates into betterment for our children.

For example, regarding primary and secondary education, achievement rates by sex generally favoured girls. The net enrolment rate for girls in primary education and at the secondary level for the school year 2005-2006 exceeded that of boys.

Clear gains have been made over the past 15 years in reducing infant mortality, which has shown a decline from 57 to 24 deaths per 1,000 live births over the past 10 years. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS has been kept well below the national target of less than 1 per cent of the population.

The 2007 Philippine MDG report shows that the country has made considerable progress, particularly in poverty reduction, nutrition, gender equality, reduction of child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, as well as in access to safe drinking water and sanitary toilet facilities. The gains for children during this period demonstrate what can be done when commitments are matched by resources and political will.

However, while our consolidated efforts have yielded promising results, critical challenges remain. Many key survival, development and protection goals that were set at the World Summit for Children and the Assembly's special session on children have yet to be met in critical areas. The Philippines intends to work harder on targets concerning access to comprehensive early childhood care and development, primary education, maternal mortality and access to reproductive health services.

Children have an important role to play in developing and implementing the agenda of "A world fit for children". We must respect their right to express themselves and to participate in matters affecting them. The Philippines has had a rich experience in actively involving children in decision-making, in advocacy, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting their rights.

A major development in the Philippines with regard to child participation includes the adoption of the National Framework for Children's Participation. The Framework provides guideposts relative to the full participation of children in planning and implementing solutions, recognizing that children are their own best advocates. In December 2006, the Philippines hosted the first South-East Asian Children's Conference and, much in keeping with the agenda of this special session, focused on HIV/AIDS, disasters, child trafficking and quality education. The children's call to action was presented to the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations Ministers of Social Welfare and Development just a few days ago for consideration.

At the core of the agenda of "A world fit for children" is a vision of the world we want for them, an awareness of the major obstacles that prevent us from achieving that vision and the need for collective action to overcome these obstacles. We believe that a comprehensive implementation of children's rights requires the cooperation of all sectors of society. Our goals can only be achieved in partnership and solidarity, both within and among countries.

The changes needed throughout the world to protect the rights of children begin with the actions taken by all of us. Everyone must play their part — Governments, non-governmental organizations, parents, families, communities and all of civil society, including children themselves. Our shared vision unites us and the message is straightforward: only by working together, building partnerships and mobilizing resources will we turn the tide in favour of our children.

The Government of the Philippines subscribes fully to the principles and objectives of "A world fit for children" and attaches great importance to its implementation nationally and globally. We reaffirm our obligation to promote and protect the rights of children, acknowledging the legal standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child — a cornerstone for follow-up action to the special session on children. We urge our child delegates, as they participate in this follow-up to the special session, to continue to be important players, whose views and actions will condition the world of tomorrow, thereby leading the way to a brighter future. Let us, together, move forward in partnership to achieve our shared vision: a world worthy of its children.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Nezha Skalli, Minister of Family, Social Development and Solidarity of Morocco.

Ms. Skalli (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session and to wish him and his staff every success in the fulfilment of the presidential mandate.

I am very honoured to present Morocco's achievements following its commitments on the adoption and follow-up of the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" since the General Assembly's special session on children, held in May 2002. Our meeting today gives us the opportunity to show the progress achieved and still being achieved, but also to underline the need to renew our efforts to protect children's rights.

The organization of this High-level Plenary Meeting devoted to the follow-up to the Plan of Action for a world fit for children is indeed a valuable opportunity to share our experiences and to compare the efforts undertaken by our countries to advance children's rights, while identifying constraints in order to better implement "A world fit for children".

The path followed by the Kingdom of Morocco in the field of human rights in general, and the efforts undertaken to promote children's rights in particular, and specifically through the national Observatory on Children's Rights, presided by Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem, allowed our country to enter the new millennium under the perspective of strengthening the state of law, while setting the issue of childhood squarely at the centre, under the directives of His Majesty King Mohammed VI.

In fulfilment of its international commitments and by virtue of the national consensus on the issue of childhood, the Kingdom of Morocco has undertaken a set of essential and qualitative reviews and amendments that integrate the concept of the best interests of children into all legal codes related to children.

Promulgations of national legislation have been followed up by a new family code that has helped Morocco to lay the foundations of a modern democratic society based on the principles of equality and justice and in which the family plays a leading role, in accordance with the international Declaration and our national plan of action under "A world fit for children". The new family code also adopted the principle of equal rights and duties between parents for forming and caring for a family. That should lead to child-rearing on an equal basis and negate all forms of discrimination based on gender.

All those reforms have culminated in the amendment of our nationality code, which grants women the right to give their nationality to their children when they are married to a foreigner.

These achievements at the legislative level have been accompanied by others at the political level, such as involving women in decision-making. That was reflected in the election of 35 women to Parliament for the first time in the year 2002. Seven women were appointed to ministerial posts, also for the first time, in the current cabinet formed two months ago.

In the context of implementing resolutions of international organizations related to the international Declaration "A world fit for children", a conference was organized to address the subject "A decade for children" that involved various Government sectors and agencies that deal with children, a group of national experts and children drawn from a children's parliament and communal councils of children. That national conference and dialogue lasted over a year and was aimed at preparing a national plan of action for children for the decade 2006-2015. A final document was presented at our eleventh national conference for the rights of children, held on 2 and 3 July 2007 under the rubric "Investment in children is a mainstay of human development".

The national plan of action, "A Morocco fit for its children", focuses on four basic priorities that must be met by the year 2015. Those priorities are guaranteeing and supporting the health of children, providing high-quality education, protecting children from all forms of violence, and combating HIV.

Together with the sectorial programme related to health and education, the Moroccan Government gives priority to child protection. Several projects have been launched in the area of social protection through child protection units to identify children in vulnerable situations and eliminate any form of violence against children, and for that purpose model units were formed to implement the project throughout the country; *Indimaj*, a programme to reintegrate street children; and *Inqad*, a programme to deal with the special conditions of girls in domestic labour.

The field of childhood and all its components require the adoption of concrete coordination mechanisms by all stakeholders, as well as a number of public programmes related to health, education, legal and social protection, and other areas related to combating poverty, exclusion, inadequate housing and better access to basic services.

That is why we are committed to ensuring that the childhood issue is integrated into the programmes of the national initiative for human development launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI in May 2005 to promote an integrated policy to manage human development, social inclusion, integration and solidarity.

The Kingdom of Morocco is aware of the importance of all reports presented at this plenary meeting, including all information and data, and underlines the need to duplicate success stories and develop coordination mechanisms to share experiences so as to better guarantee children's rights to healthy growth, quality education and the protection necessary to ensure a Morocco fit for children.

I take this opportunity to thank all our partners and all United Nations agencies, and in particular the UNICEF office in Morocco, for their cooperation and support through the development process of our national plan of action on childhood.

I wish every success to our meeting and reiterate, on behalf of the Moroccan delegation, all my gratitude to the General Assembly for organizing this follow-up meeting. I would also like to reaffirm the strong political will of the Kingdom of Morocco to ensure continuity and undertake new efforts to promote a world of peace, security, pacific coexistence among nations — a world that rejects all forms of intolerance and violence.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Maria Rosaria Bindi, Minister of Family of Italy.

Ms. Bindi (Italy) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is a great honour for me to bear witness in this forum to the Italian Government's commitment to children and to confirm our common goal of pursuing together the welfare of girls and boys at every stage and dimension of their lives.

A world fit for children is a world fit for everyone. That sentence summarizes the spirit in which our Governments endorsed the final declaration of the 2002 special session on children. It expresses in the highest form our responsibility as adults to the world as a whole and to its future.

For Italy, that translates into the challenge of a national and international policy that recognizes the child's value, autonomy and perspective as essential assets in the promotion of more fair, shared and lasting cultural, civic and economic growth. Within the European Union and the Council of Europe, Italy is strongly committed to the implementation of the objectives of the 2002 special session of the General Assembly. We express that commitment through our support for the various competent international organizations, particularly UNICEF, to which Italy is a top contributor.

The data contained in the report just published by UNICEF indicate that, despite the progress made, much remains to be done to achieve the 2002 objectives. The resolution on children's rights that this General Assembly will adopt in the next few days invites us to pursue our efforts towards concrete and effective protection from every form of violence and exploitation. Italy welcomes with great satisfaction the historical decision to establish the post of special representative to the Secretary-General on violence against children. Italy has long fought for an international ban on every form of corporal punishment. We hope that this goal can be clearly expressed by the General Assembly in next year's resolution on children's rights.

The commitments that Italy signed in May 2002 were confirmed that same year in a comprehensive national action plan for 2002 to 2004, which reaffirmed the centrality of a child's or young person's relationship with his or her family. I wish to recall the commitment to ensure that every child has a family. In Italy in the mid-1990s approximately 30,000 children lived in institutions. Today, thanks to a programme to close the old orphanages, approximately 13,000 children reside in quality family communities and have been placed in adoption and foster care programmes.

Italy has improved its international adoption procedures to bring them into line with The Hague convention: in the past five years, 16,137 foreign children have been welcomed into and adopted by Italian families. In the framework of development cooperation, Italy updated its Cooperation Guidelines on Issues related to Minors in 2004. It is pursuing many actions implemented in various countries of the world to fight malnutrition and infant mortality; foster basic education and social health care for minors; construct a juvenile justice system; promote the social inclusion of differently able minors; and fight the worst forms of exploitation, such as child labor, the recruitment of children in armed conflicts, sexual exploitation and trafficking.

In recent years new steps have been taken in Italy in the framework of prevention, protection and rehabilitation of children from sexual and economic exploitation and from every form of violence. This commitment has been reinforced by the approval of recent laws that increase penalties for such crimes, and by the creation of a data bank that will allow for better information, better monitoring and better prevention strategies on this complex issue.

Italy is also committed to drafting effective new measures against child labour exploitation, a central theme chosen by the General Assembly for 2008. Through the joint efforts of public institutions, employers' organizations, trade unions and non-governmental organizations, we are focusing first and foremost on reducing school drop-out rates and on a renewed awareness of its international dimensions.

As Minister of Family, I wish to underline the primary responsibility of the family — of all families — in the protection, care, growth and development of girls and boys. Therefore, it is more important than ever that this concept be included in the draft final declaration of this Meeting (A/62/L.31).

In this regard, starting in 2006, the Italian Government sought to usher in a stronger new phase of investments and actions to benefit children, adolescents and their families. Important new resources have been made available to develop a system of quality socio-educational services for children, to prevent violence and abuse, to eradicate poverty and support parenthood, and to improve the standard of living and the social integration processes of foreign minors. In fewer than two years, more than €4 billion have been invested to achieve those objectives.

We realize that our country has yet to accomplish all of its goals. For this reason, we are preparing a new national plan of action that we would like to implement through the widespread participation of civil society, non-governmental organizations and a strong proactive role for children. We have identified six priority areas of intervention. We want to promote and enhance all the forms of direct participation of children in civic life, committing national and local institutions to this end. We intend to forge an education pact to foster the growth and autonomy of children as people. We are convinced that education is a common good that demands a common effort. It is a matter of the utmost urgency that we act decisively to reduce child poverty.

Italy has transformed itself from a country of emigration into one of immigration. Illegal immigration raises new issues that Italy wishes to address by drawing inspiration from the principles of legality and solidarity. We are committed to promoting actions for foreign minors that take into account the age, gender, ethnic or religious background of children, especially those who are of Roma or Sinti ethnicity, in the framework of an integrated approach, which protects children and respects the principle of family unity.

We are considering a reform of the judicial system to strengthen the protection of children and families through the appointment of special judges. We wish to strengthen the network of high-quality social, health and educational services to assure a consistent nationwide level of services.

We need to recognize children and adolescents as protagonists of and participants in the choices that regard them. We need to get past the idea of the child as a problem, as the passive object of adults' actions or worse, as the property of its family. Such an approach views children merely in terms of their becoming adults in an unspecified future rather than as a reality of today.

Instead, we need to promote a policy that responds effectively to emergencies and rights that are still denied, but that is also capable of accompanying and promoting the normalcy of children's lives. That is why we need to give a voice to children — boys and girls — and to listen to them. Only in this way can we recognize their full citizenship and open the way to a new pedagogy of human development that will help all of us, both children and adults, to build a better world together.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency João Baptista Kussumua, President of the National Council of Children, Minister for Social Assistance and Reintegration of Angola.

Mr. Kussumua (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): On behalf of my Government and my people, I would like to express my condolences to the victims resulting from the violence in Algiers today, and their families.

On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to welcome the work of this special Meeting on children. This Meeting is of particular importance for Angola due to the fact that most of its population is young. Some 60 per cent of Angolans are under the age of 18. Assuring the well-being of this young segment of the population and protecting their fundamental rights is an imperative and strategic goal of the Government. Within the framework of its national programme of action for the follow-up, development and protection of the child, as recommended by the 1990 world Summit for Children, the Government of Angola submitted its 2003 and 2004 reports to the committee monitoring the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

In June 2004, the Government held the first national forum on early childhood care and development in Angola, during which 10 commitments were assumed for the fulfillment of children's rights. In September 2004, the Council of Ministers established an Interministerial Commission for Coordination of Early Childhood Related Activities, comprising 16 ministerial sectors and the National Children's Institute, mainly aimed at promoting initiatives in favour of children under 5 years of age. The three-day Forum on Early Childhood Care and Development conducted in June this year, discussed measures that will contribute to the application of article 30 of the constitution, which stipulates that children are an absolute priority, for which reason they should enjoy the special protection of the family, State and society with a view to their full development.

Last April, the Government approved the establishment of the National Children's Council, as an instrument to evaluate, follow-up and monitor the execution of the national child protection and development policy and the actions of local organs responsible for its execution. Being a legal entity with financial and administrative autonomy, the Council is composed of 35 counsellors, 17 of whom are representatives of the Government and 18 representatives of civil society, thus reflecting the fact that it is the outcome of a transparent, dynamic and broad process.

Since 2002, the Government of Angola has been implementing a new strategy to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with the creation of a national AIDS commission. In 2004, it approved the AIDS Act, setting out the legal provisions for the protection of children against stigmatization and discrimination, which led to the creation of the National AIDS Institute in 2005. According to studies conducted in 2004, the average HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in Angola is within the range of 3.9 per cent, which is relatively low when compared to those of other countries in the region.

One of the priorities of the Government of Angola is strengthening national capacities to revitalize and ensure the provision of essential services benefiting women and children. In that regard, by 2005, we intend to have a broad strategic plan to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates and to promote healthy living. We hope by 2009 to reduce by 50 per cent the current mortality rate of children under the age of 5; reduce by 30 per cent the rate of malnutrition of children under the age of 5; and reduce by 30 per cent the maternal mortality rate.

We also wish to promote healthy living, and our efforts in this area include a national maternal and infant mortality reduction strategy plan for 2004 to 2008. The Government recognizes that access to drinking water and hygienic conditions are prerequisites for the improvement of public health and the reduction of morbidity and mortality rates. In September, the National Water Act brought about reforms in public policy in the sanitation sector and increased partnerships in the integrated management of water resources, which are translating into wider coverage and access of the population to drinking water.

Ensuring the well-being of children does not simply mean preserving their health, but also providing a solid education to make them a future agent of national development. The Government is implementing educational reforms aimed at, inter alia, guaranteeing quality universal basic education for all children from six to 18 years of age and strengthening the capacity and quality of the teachers.

With the support of UNICEF, Angola's National Children's Institute is coordinating multisectoral initiatives to combat child trafficking in certain parts of the country. Furthermore, the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Plan of Action and Intervention Strategy is also being reviewed in order to propose measures that are better suited to the problems of our days and strengthen the Government's strategy in this area.

In order to give greater attention to and provide better treatment for child violence cases, in particular violence against females, a department dealing with violence against women and children was created at Angola's National Criminal Investigation Directorate.

Since the achievement of peace in 2002, Angola has taken decisive steps towards enhancing the living conditions of the population, both in resource mobilization and in providing more effective and careful management of resources for the achievement of the goals of a world fit for children. We believe that child promotion strategies require a policy to fight against poverty. It affects women, which is why it has a negative impact on children. Thus, one of the development policy priorities in Angola is to ensure the well-being of the population by reducing poverty.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the firm commitment of His Excellency the President and head of Government of Angola, Mr. José Eduardo dos Santos, to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, always maintaining the condition of the Angolan child at the centre of his attention and programmes. My delegation hopes that the declaration and plan of action to be adopted at the end of this session will effectively serve the interests of our children worldwide and strengthen our firm determination to fulfil our responsibilities for their full achievement.

The President: I now call on Her Excellency 'Mathabiso Angeline Lepono, Minister of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

Mrs. Lepono (Lesotho): I join other delegations in conveying my heartfelt condolences to the people of Algeria regarding the tragedy that befell them this morning.

Allow me to extend fraternal greetings from the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Allow me also to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly.

Five years ago, we met in a similar fashion to commit ourselves to the creation of a world fit for children. We were inspired by the belief that, should we create circumstances conducive to the mental, physical, social and economic development of our children, we would have done our part in the development of a prosperous future community. To that end, we adopted a Plan of Action and agreed to meet five years down the line to review our progress and recommit ourselves to our noble goals.

The Kingdom of Lesotho remains committed to the ideals and goals we adopted five years ago. I say that with authority, for I led our delegation to the General Assembly's special session on children in 2002 and I am currently still the Minister responsible for the coordination of children's affairs in Lesotho. That has allowed me to oversee the national processes that are leading to the achievement of a Lesotho fit for children, and therefore an Africa fit for children and, indeed, a world fit for children. As will be apparent from my statement, the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has made considerable progress in creating a country fit for children and honouring the commitments it undertook in 2002.

Allow me also to mention that the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho, led by His Majesty King Letsie III, under the able advice of the Government, led by the Right Honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili, adopted a national vision, aptly termed Vision 2020. This national vision embraces the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on which the Plan of Action for a world fit for children is based. In other words, the Kingdom of Lesotho has incorporated the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Action into its national policies. Theoretically, that would be an achievement worthy of applause. However, real change in our children's circumstances is the ultimate goal.

Allow me to briefly highlight a few examples that illustrate the Kingdom of Lesotho's resolve to create a world fit for children. Children are the most vulnerable members of society, due mainly to their dependence on their elders in society for mental and physical sustenance. Continual exploitation for economic and social purposes continues to plague the development of our children.

To combat this trend, the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho enacted the Sexual Offences Act of 2003. This milestone Act aims at protecting children and women from sexual abuse and exploitation. The Act defines, in a very clear manner, acts that were previously not considered to be sexual offences as such. It increases the penalties for common law offences and newly defined offences for the purposes of deterrence.

The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho introduced a free primary education programme in 2000, using a one year, or one or cohort, at a time approach. In 2006, the Government achieved the goal of State-sponsored primary education. The challenge that remains is to sustain this achievement, taking into consideration the economic situation that we are in. As a least developed country, my country is continually grappling with the problem of sustaining programmes needed for the economic, political and social development of our citizenry. Hence our persistent clarion call to our development partners for support towards sustainable economic growth that would lead to economic independence.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss if I did not express our gratitude to UNICEF and our development partners. Heads of State or Government of Africa and the European Union met recently in Portugal for the European Union-Africa Summit where they committed themselves to mutual economic and social growth. In the same spirit, I urge us all to work towards the achievement of a world fit for children through the Plan of Action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Catherine Fonck, Minister of Health, Childhood and Youth Assistance of the Government of the French Community of Belgium.

Ms. Fonck (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The United Nations deserves praise for planning this High-level Meeting. Five years after the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in the document "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), the moment had come to assess the achievements accomplished in the context of its implementation.

In these five years, real progress has been made, but new challenges have also arisen. At a time when globalization has intensified, the situation of children remains critical, with persistent poverty; pandemics such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; armed conflicts that claim child soldiers among their victims; and environmental degradation linked, inter alia, to climate change.

Following the May 2002 special session on children, Belgium adopted a national plan of action for children. This sets the priorities related to children's rights for the coming years. In addition, Belgium very recently established a National Commission for Children's Rights, whose statute, mandate, and composition reflect the criteria and expectations of the

United Nations. The Commission is a true platform for discussion that is broadly inclusive and open to the participation of civil society. It provides civil society with an appropriate forum for calling for and motivating action by public authorities in the area of protecting and promoting children's rights. The voice of civil society, of those who work every day for the well-being of children, will from now on be indispensable.

The question of the participation of children and taking into account what they have to say is a fundamental one, including for the most vulnerable children, such as those who are disabled or very sick. That is why in Belgium now children are as often as possible heard in divorce proceedings on matters of concern to them. In addition, in Belgium, each level of power is seeking to strengthen the participation of children and young people where they live. This strengthening of participation can be seen through local and regional consultative commissions for children and young people, where they are invited to state their views on policy projects that affect them directly or indirectly.

The participation of young people and children is also fully seen in non-governmental youth organizations at all socio-cultural levels, where children are invited to experience responsible, active, critical, and united citizenship. These policies fit seamlessly into the priorities of the European Union in youth matters.

I therefore particularly applaud the genuine participation of children and youth in the Children's Forum, this Plenary Meeting and the round tables.

For us, there is no contradiction between giving children the opportunity to have an effect on their own lives and on society and preserving the role to be played by adults. Limits and points of reference too are necessary for the development of the child.

Combating violence against children is another priority. In Belgium, efforts have been made by the justice system and the psycho-medico-social systems in order to mobilize the expertise necessary to keep children from any act of abuse. Regional platforms for cooperation have been set up so that various actors in the fight against child abuse can coordinate their approaches. In our country, the activities of the Child Focus Association provide an example of an original partnership established between public authorities and the private sector with regard to international child abductions, disappearances, sexual exploitation and child pornography, in particular on the Internet.

In parallel with these measures, Belgium authorities are resolutely committed to a family policy focusing on well-being. Success in education does not depend only on parents, but also on the will of institutions to validate and value parental responsibility. To this end, parent support programmes have been set up and refined with a view to taking a positive and supportive approach to families.

Defending and promoting the rights of children internationally can only be done through solidarity and by building cooperation among nations. That is the purpose of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as of The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. This Convention represents an outstanding effort of international cooperation among States of origin and receiving States. Countries of origin have obtained recognition of the subsidiarity of adoption, the adoption of measures that make it difficult for child traffickers and guarantees as to the quality of adoptive parents. Receiving countries, thanks to the partnership that has thus been forged, here obtained guarantees that adoption will take place in the best interests of the child.

This major progress in the rights of the child — as reflected in Belgium in the reform of the adoption process — has come up against a lack of understanding by many people who are in the process of adopting children and other members of the public, who have difficulty accepting lengthier adoption procedures and the relaxed limitation on the number of adoptable children. Despite such criticism, we have pursued our policies in the best interests of children above all others.

The twenty-first century will be, more than preceding ones, a century of challenges, among which the well-being of children is crucial. Since 1989, considerable progress has been achieved, but it is not enough. I appeal to countries that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so. Children's rights, however, are not limited to the ratification of conventions. They involve daily actions called for by parents, teachers, educators or political officials. We should ask ourselves what kind of world we are leaving to our children, but, more than that, we must ask ourselves what kind of children we want to leave to our world.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Sharifa bint Khalfan bin Nasser Al-Yahyai, Minister of Social Development of Oman.

Ms. Al-Yahyai (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to convey to all representatives the greetings of the Government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman, who welcome the convening of this international meeting to evaluate and improve the action of States and to renew the commitments undertaken at the local and international levels to make our world fit for our children who are the future of humankind.

We are gathered today to follow up the international community's achievements with respect to the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27, annex). We are well aware of the problems besetting our world and their dimensions, sources and ramifications, and we know that the first victims of these problems are children and their families, who constitute the foundations of the international community. We are also aware of the major challenges that we are facing, which can be overcome only by renewed commitments and pledges.

Our commitments and ongoing efforts to improve the lives and promote the rights of children and of humankind are enhanced by the lofty teachings of our Islamic religion and the noble guidance of our Islamic sharia law. We are convinced that the best course of action is to care for children in order to establish a stable society where human rights are promoted for all people and all age groups.

Based on our conviction and our commitment to the international community's efforts to achieve growth and a better future for children, the Omani national committee on children's affairs has been cooperating with international programmes and measures to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child since Oman's accession to the Convention in 1996.

We have been making every effort to provide a healthy environment for children. These efforts are summarized in a document entitled "An Oman fit for children", which is linked to the Millennium Development Goals. We ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2004, and in 2005 we submitted our second national report on the implementation of the Convention. We are exerting our utmost efforts to devise a national strategy on children.

Returning to the purpose of our gathering — to improve upon the action undertaken to date in line with "A world fit for children" — allow me to offer some examples of the efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman. In the area of health, we have been making every effort to provide life-long health care for all citizens and residents in the Sultanate. We have placed major emphasis on prevention of disease. On 1 December, we started the implementation of a national strategy on HIV/AIDS.

In the field of child protection, we wish to emphasize that we have established a workshop to review Omani legislation; this will pave the way to enacting an Omani bill on children that will take into consideration the relevant international conventions. We have also established informal task forces to study child exclusion and neglect so that such situations can be remedied.

With regard to education, the enrolment age has been reduced from 6 years to 5 years and 10 months in public schools, and to 5 and a half years in private schools. Primary school enrolment reached 92.1 per cent in 2003-2004, rising from 86.6 in 1993-1994; this represents an increase of 0.62 per cent. We also attach great importance to pre-school education, and have increased the number of kindergartens in the Sultanate. We stress the importance of listening to the voices of children in establishing programmes to formulate policies and programmes relating to them.

In closing, I wish to place maximum emphasis on the goal of our gathering, which is to improve our action, in order to achieve a loftier goal: to make our world truly fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Askar Shakirov, National Ombudsman of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Shakirov (Kazakhstan): It is indisputable that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the outcome document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), are fundamental and comprehensive documents on the protection of the rights of the child, and that they play a central role in this area. We attach great importance to that session and its outcome document, and we welcome this five-year review of the special session and endorse the draft declaration to be adopted at the end of the present High-level Plenary Meeting.

The international community has made significant progress since the special session. However, it is obvious that that progress remains insufficient to improve the status of children around the world and to enable us to attain the objectives set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Plan of Action contained in "A world fit for children" and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The practical implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of "A world fit for children" depends largely on the political will and economic capacity of United Nations Member States and on the effectiveness of the international assistance provided to countries in need.

The implementation of these key documents is a priority of my country's internal policy. Kazakhstan takes a multisectoral approach to the promotion of children's rights and interests. The process involves Government agencies, our human rights ombudsman, national non-governmental organizations and youth movements, which cooperate closely with one another.

Over the past five years, the Government of Kazakhstan has been strengthening the national legal framework for the protection of children. My country is enhancing its legislation and creating conditions conducive to teaching and educating children, protecting their health and providing them with social assistance. Budgetary allocations for the development of children are doubled each year. In 2006, expenditures devoted to the social protection of children constituted 41.3 per cent of the national budget. I should like to stress once again that approximately 99 per cent of the children of Kazakhstan are covered by compulsory primary education and that there is no gender disparity in education levels.

In keeping with the recommendation made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in response to Kazakhstan's initial report under the Convention, the Government of Kazakhstan has established a committee on child protection within the Ministry of Education and Science. Our national human rights plan ensures the inclusion of children's rights as a subject in school and university curricula. The Preschool Childhood national research centre, has been founded in Kazakhstan. The centre's main objective is the formulation and implementation of a preschool education strategy and the analysis and study of that subject. A national child protection programme for 2007-2011 sets out basic strategic policy guidelines on the promotion and protection of children's rights and establishes an effective system providing legal and social guarantees to children of all categories. Approximately $49 million has already been allocated for the initial stage of the strategy's implementation.

Kazakhstan condemns all forms of violence against children. We believe that the conclusions and recommendations contained in Mr. Pinheiro's landmark study on violence against children (see A/61/299) constitute a good basis for the efforts of Member States and the United Nations system to ensure effective prevention of violence against children and the protection of all children from violence.

We are implementing a 2006-2008 Government plan of action to combat and prevent crimes involving human trafficking. Thirty-eight crisis centres have been established for women and children who are victims of violence. A law aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency, child neglect and child homelessness has been adopted. Earlier this year, the local government authorities in each district of the country established separate departments on the protection of children's rights.

Kazakhstan has been consistent in its efforts to ensure further development of its social services system, which must meet the needs of disadvantaged and disabled children and must support families with children. However, despite those efforts, disabled children, child abandonment, juvenile delinquency and child neglect remain serious problems. Child mortality continues to be a matter of great concern. The spread of HIV/AIDS is an emerging challenge to the country.

The Government of Kazakhstan is tackling these problems in close cooperation with international organizations and with United Nations specialized agencies such as UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNESCO.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm once again our strong commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children" (A/62/259), failure to achieve the goals agreed upon at the 2002 special session on children will significantly undermine efforts to achieve the MDGs. Therefore, we cannot fail to honour the commitments and promises that we have made in order to build a world fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Huseynova (Azerbaijan): Permit me to express, on behalf of the delegation of Azerbaijan, our condolences with regard to the tragedy that took place in Algeria. We share the grief of the families of the victims.

It is my honour and privilege to address this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the organizers for making this important event happen. I would also like to thank the United Nations, in particular its specialized agencies, for their valuable assistance and support in our national efforts to protect the rights of children, which in turn contribute to the strengthening of democratic society in Azerbaijan.

The Government of Azerbaijan does its best to secure a safe and peaceful present and future for our children. That can be seen from the legislative and administrative reforms carried out recently in our country, as well as from our implementation of international documents. It is worth pointing out that one of the first conventions that Azerbaijan ratified was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In 2006, the President of Azerbaijan issued a decree on the establishment of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs. The State Committee determines and regulates national policy related to children's issues and supervises its implementation. We have also established a coordination council on children's issues, in keeping with one of the most important recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Earlier this year, the State Committee elaborated a national action plan on children and submitted it to the Cabinet of Ministers. On 1 June 2007, with the support of UNICEF, a Children's Parliament was established in Azerbaijan; it includes 85 representatives from throughout the country.

Like many other countries, we are especially concerned about the problem of children infected with HIV/AIDS. In order to promote preventive measures, the National AIDS Centre is conducting awareness-raising campaigns, with a special focus on the regions of Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijan Government has adopted a plan of action to address the problems of homeless children and street children. Supporting children with special needs is another priority of our Government. We have recently established rehabilitation centres for children and support centres for families and children, and 163 children with disabilities have been integrated into inclusive education programmes.

In spite of the Government's strong will to take all steps necessary to protect and guarantee children's rights in our country, it has proved harder to make progress in the face of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia. As a result of that aggression, over 1 million people have become refugees and displaced persons, 200,000 of whom are children, who are the most vulnerable group of the population. Azerbaijan implements special programmes with the assistance of the United Nations specialized agencies to promote the integration of that sector of the population into normal life.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Today in Azerbaijan, 202 non-governmental organizations working in the children's sphere have been registered by the Ministry of Justice. One, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, headed by the first lady of Azerbaijan, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, is a leading organization in that sphere. Among the most successful projects implemented by the Foundation are those known as "Optimal Care for Diabetic Children", "For a Life without Thalassemia", and "A New School for the New Azerbaijan", dedicated to building and renovating about 300 hundred schools, including those in the most remote regions, and equipping them with all the necessary modern equipment. Taking into account the importance of family for every child, the President of

Azerbaijan approved a State programme on deinstitutionalization and alternative care 2006-2015.

I believe all will agree with me that one of the main components of a world fit for children is providing them with access to quality education, as also enshrined in our Constitution. With respect to our commitments to child protection, legislative reforms conducted in our country should be specifically mentioned. Among those, legislative acts envisioning preventive measures and provisions against child trafficking, the protection of children from abuse and exploitation, and the prohibition of child pornography are important achievements in reforming national legislation.

A law on domestic violence has been elaborated by our committee and submitted to the National Parliament for adoption. The law includes special provisions on protecting children against violence occurring in the family. We also intend to regulate the problem of early marriage with relevant amendments to the family code, which are also recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Naturally, along with the positive trends, we face certain problems in that sphere, such as an insufficiency of trained social workers. The State has already taken appropriate measures to fill that gap. A social work degree programme has been opened at Baku State University, and we intend to launch similar degree programmes at other universities within a few years. The experience of international experts in that field would be very helpful.

Many of the problems mentioned are common, I think, not only to Azerbaijan, but to many countries. We are open to and hope to continue our cooperation with international organizations, United Nations agencies, and governmental and non-governmental organizations for creating a world fit for children. We can take action on a global scale, which is critical to meeting all the Millennium Development Goals.

In conclusion, I would like, on behalf of the Azerbaijani delegation, to express once more our gratitude for the opportunity to be here, and wish all participants success.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Fatimetou Mint Khattri, Minister for Promotion of Women, Children and Family Affairs of Mauritania.

Ms. Mint Khattri (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express my solidarity with and deep condolences to the families of the victims of the attack that took place today in Algeria.

I also congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his leadership of this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children, held in May 2002 under the rubric "A world fit for children".

I should also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his very thorough report and his tireless efforts via all specialized United Nations agencies, and in particular UNICEF, to promote the cause of children in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

The question of children in general has always held pride of place in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. In that respect, we have closely followed or participated in all international and regional events. We ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child at an early stage and have brought our legislation and development programmes into line with the Convention's commitments and provisions. Our efforts were consolidated through reform of the electoral process in the holding of democratic and transparent presidential, legislative and municipal elections, ushering in a new era based on a multi-party State, State institutions, justice, human rights, national unity — all factors in promoting the sustainable development that benefits all sectors of society.

Legislation criminalizing slavery and promoting the return of Mauritanians affected by human trafficking is part of my country's historical commitment to its promises. It has been supported by national consensus, burnishing the credibility of the State and Government among their partners, as reflected in the donors meeting in Paris, the results of which were beyond everyone's expectations. The commitments of donors exceeded by more than half a billion dollars what we expected, which has opened new prospects for children in general through educational and health programmes aimed at enhancing public services such as water and electricity improving the quality of life and mitigating poverty.

Since the May 2002 special session, we have worked to promote a legislative framework for children and to strengthen the capacities of various sectors to respond to children's needs in an integrated fashion. The State secretariat for children has been raised to the level of a ministry, and the establishment of a children's welfare institution has improved conditions for children.

Our legislation has been enriched by a series of new laws, including on the protection of children, the punishment of those who exploit them, the prohibition of slavery and slavery-like practices. Those qualitative legislative advances have been accompanied by deep reforms in our judicial system that have strengthened the independence of the judiciary from the executive branch. The State has also worked to protect children from trafficking, exploitation, prostitution and pornography. The Government recently developed a strategy framework integrating the child dimension into all programmes so as to create an atmosphere conducive to the welfare of children.

Our family policies have been revised and our national policy for children is being modified at this time. A 10-year education plan has also been implemented, making it possible to narrow the gender gap in education enrolment in 2005 to 94.7 per cent for boys and 92.4 per cent for girls. We are now trying to improve the quality of life for children in the fields of education and health. Those efforts include promoting access to medical care, which has been considerably improved despite the high rate of maternal and child mortality.

Those programmes have been accompanied by outreach policies on nutrition and protection against sexually transmitted diseases. They also include awareness about the dangers of mines and efforts at demining, outreach and awareness campaigns concerning the rights of children, and the details of international conventions and the family code. These efforts aim ultimately at alleviating the domestic burden on women.

Women have been making great political progress in Mauritania and represent 20 per cent of both chambers of parliament and more than 33 per cent of municipal councils, in addition to their presence in the diplomatic arena, where they occupy high-level administrative and diplomative posts and are involved with the rights of children. For the first time, they have become heads of mission.

We are broadly implementing education programmes that are directed towards the family and local communities. We have also created a children's parliament, which has held its first meeting and met with the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. The children's parliament has effectively staffed apprenticeships to work on the issue of democracy, thus inculcating those ideals among young people.

I have just provided a succinct account of the success achieved in my country in issues of concern to children. Like other countries, we need international partnerships and the contribution of United Nations bodies, in particular UNICEF, in order to produce the resources necessary to support our projects and programmes. Our country is thus working to create a promising atmosphere for its children in a world where countries with weak economies are finding it impossible to meet the basic needs of children.

I wish all countries every success with this task.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aghvan Vardanian, Minister of Labour and Social Issues of Armenia.

Mr. Vardanian (Armenia) (*spoke in Russian*): I wish at the outset to welcome all those gathered here and to thank the organizers of this meeting for this opportunity to speak.

I wish to confirm our commitment to the aims and mission of the Declaration "A world fit for children". The Government of Armenia has consistently undertaken actions to protect and ensure the well-being of children of our country and to create a society based on the principles of democracy, equality, peace and social justice.

Trends in the social development of contemporary Armenian society bear witness to the fact that the aim of our state social policy is to create conditions to ensure a decent life and free development of the child.

One criterion for evaluating legislative progress in recent years with regard to protecting the rights of children is the adoption and implementation of a national programme to protect the rights of children to the year 2015. The programme is based on our commitment to meeting the basic needs of children, their social well-being, education, and health care, and includes provisions on their legal and humane treatment.

One genuine achievement in protecting the rights of and fulfilling our obligations towards children has been the creation of a three-tiered system for protecting those rights and interests in the Republic of Armenia. The system is comprised of organs of local government and departments for the protection of children's rights in the administrative structures of the 11 regions and a national commission for the protection of children.

It should be noted in particular that, in the family code adopted in 2004, a special chapter is devoted to the rights of children and provides the right of the child to live and be brought up in a family, the right to property, the right to protection from violence and the right to free expression. One priority of the programme's social policy is to reduce infant mortality, the indices of which are now showing positive movement. In that context, it can be affirmed that Armenia's social policy on children is in harmony with provisions and decisions defining the importance of childhood to all subsequent stages of human life, the decisive role of education and its availability to all children, ensuring their well-being and health, and the need to protect them from violence.

Priority allocations from the State budget are now financing the social sphere and the development of human resources. That is corroborated by the fact that 46 per cent of the State budget for 2008 is devoted to expenses in the social sphere. On the whole, we are planning major future investments in education, social welfare, social insurance and health care. We also intend to increase budgetary expenditures in the area of education by almost 20 per cent and to increase the resources available to the family allowance by 12 per cent.

In addressing the problems currently facing children, the Government is working closely with international organizations. We are particularly grateful to UNICEF for its effective cooperation and assistance. Armenia also actively participates in promoting the rights of children at the regional level. The Council of Europe programme known as "Building a Europe for and with children" is being effectively implemented, including through the elaboration of a new convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and violence.

There can be no doubt that many social problems have been resolved in recent years. The social sphere is a matter of priority for Armenia, and in 2012 we intend to double our investment in that area.

Of course, there remain a number of unsolved problems with regard to the protection of children's rights, but where there is a will and a desire on the part of States and society, there is an opportunity for those problems to be completely resolved.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Hadja Fatoumata Tété Nabé, Minister of Social Affairs, Advancement of Women and Childhood of Guinea.

Ms. Tété Nabé (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the delegation of Guinea, which I have the honour of heading, I wish transmit to the President of the Assembly our appreciation for the manner in which he continues to lead the work of the General Assembly and to convey our particular thanks for the convening of this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children.

I should also like to extend to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon the support and encouragement of His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic, and of its Prime Minister and Head of Government, Mr. Lansana Kouyaté, for the initiatives taken and the efforts made in conducting the affairs of this Organization.

My delegation thanks the high-level representatives for their introductory comments guiding our work. We endorse the statement made by the representative of Ghana on behalf of the African Union, and we join in the messages of solidarity and sympathy extended to the Government and the people of Algeria, struck today by a cowardly terrorist attack.

Five years ago, in adopting resolution S-27/2, "A world fit for children", world leaders assessed progress achieved and identified obstacles to be overcome and measures to undertake to ensure the effective implementation of the objectives established by the international community in implementing their common commitments for children. By organizing this plenary meeting, the international community is renewing its commitment and showing greater determination to ensure a better future for children. My delegation therefore welcomes the report of the Secretary-General, which refers to a number of challenges and includes a variety of recommendations on measures to take for achieving greater progress.

The four objectives of the special session devoted to children strengthen the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which help focus attention on the rights of children. Despite the progress achieved, we believe that the collective and individual action of a number of actors in the international community are still essential in order to strengthen legal norms, partnerships and financing for educational, social, cultural and economic programmes for children.

My country, the Republic of Guinea, which participated actively in the special session of 2002, had the opportunity to share the progress achieved in implementing the decisions of the World Summit for Children. Since then, the Government has initiated a number of actions, which, with the support of national and international partners, have begun to have a positive effect.

The provisions taken by the Government in implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action for A world fit for children have focused, inter alia, on promoting a better and healthier existence for children, primarily by combating abuse, exploitation, violence and intolerable forms of child labour. All this involves and requires quality education for girls and children living in difficult situations, in particular those from rural areas. The progress achieved, which is discussed in the report that Guinea submitted to the African Union, with a copy sent to UNICEF, represents the measures taken by the Government with the support of its partners.

The Republic of Guinea, along with its development partners, within the framework of the main activities to achieve the MDGs, and in order to meet the objectives of the Declaration and Plan of Action of A world fit for children, has drafted a document on national strategies to reduce poverty, which focuses on economic growth, access to social and basic services and improving governance. My country has also participated number of regional and subregional initiatives, including the meeting in July 2006 organized by the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States, which brought together 26 West and Central African States and led to the signing of a resolution against child trafficking.

Despite progress achieved at all levels, it must be noted that there are still a number of important challenges to be met. We are duty-bound to ensure A world fit for children and we will only meet that goal if we work together to preserve peace and promote effective development. Here, my delegation would like to thank its bilateral and multilateral partners, in particular UNICEF, for their support. We would underscore the importance of cooperation among Governments, as well as with non-governmental organizations, civil society and other actors, so that everyone can shoulder their respective responsibilities in preserving an environment in which growth and development for children is ensured in a world of peace, security and prosperity. My delegation, which hopes that the efforts being undertaken will lead to conclusive results, will spare no effort to offer its modest contribution to our common efforts to build a world in which children will be better protected and able to flourish.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Kirsys Fernández de Valenzuela, Minister of State for Children of the Dominican Republic.

Ms. Fernández de Valenzuela (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people and the Government of the Dominican Republic, and in particular on behalf of its children and young people, I welcome this opportunity to briefly share some of the progress and challenges in our national efforts to meet the goals enshrined in the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children".

The purpose of this special meeting is to assess the promising actions to improve the quality of life of children worldwide. According to assessments, important progress has been achieved in improving vital areas of the physical, social, emotional and spiritual progress of children and adolescents in our countries.

The Dominican Republic has signed legal, ethical and social commitments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Millennium Development Goals, the 10 principles of the Declaration that has brought us here today and, consequently, its Plan of

Action. In that context, we would underscore the following achievements and challenges.

We have established a new law in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have left behind the old focus on guardianship that prevailed in previous regulations. Law 136/03 differentiates between the social issues of children and adolescents and conflicts of a criminal nature and therefore provides specific ways to formulate measures for protection and prevention. The law also considers the issues of intersectoral coordination, planning and supervision of action, as well as participation and the restoration of rights.

However, ensuring that all elements of the law are implemented effectively and become efficient instruments for the preparation and implementation of policies remains among the major challenges.

The Dominican Republic is one of the seven pilot countries in the United Nations Millennium Project. We are the first Latin American nation to complete an assessment of requirements and costs for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At present, we have a national commission to monitor compliance with the MDGs, headed by the President of the Republic and which includes United Nations agencies operating in the country.

To achieve the MDGs, the Dominican Government established in 2005 a category of protected programmes. In the area of health the goals achieved include a reduction in infant mortality of children under the age of 5 and an improvement in maternal health. We are combating HIV/AIDS and working to ensure a sustainable environment. Those four measures receive funding for some 15 programmes which are part of the national income budget and public spending law.

In the area of health and education, public spending has increased progressively. In 2004, both areas represented 2.75 per cent of our gross national product; this year they represent 4.37 per cent. There has also been a sustained increase in public investment to alleviate poverty through innovative programmes.

Within the framework of a social cohesion strategy, the Dominican Government is committed to meeting the MDGs. However, the underlying causes of social exclusion and inequality continue to have a negative impact on the full enjoyment of the rights of children and adolescents. According to the UNDP Human Development Report of 2005, there was a high concentration of income and wealth in the Dominican Republic and that has had a negative impact on progress in the area of human development. The Government is aware of that and has therefore improved social investment.

In order to ensure sustainable achievements Governmental and institutional support is required in creating and implementing fiscal and public spending policies. We must also monitor interventions aimed at goal-oriented results.

The National Action for Children Commission, a leading body over which I am honoured to preside, is planning next year to focus our efforts on designing and implementing an information and monitoring system for children. As part of meeting our major challenges it is important that all public policies — especially economic policies — have a positive impact on children and adolescents based on their development needs and their best interests. It is especially important that we increase social investment and strengthen institutional capacities at the central and local government levels.

Our priorities continue to focus on developing mechanisms for the protection system; redoubling our efforts to improve the quality of life, in particular with regard to child development and survival; improving education; providing comprehensive quality care for newborns; increasing basic social services with a focus on vulnerable groups, particularly those suffering from HIV/AIDS; continuing to combat child abuse and the worst forms of child labour, focusing on the needs of children living in the street; and promoting greater participation.

In alliance with agencies providing cooperation, in particular with guidance from the country programme 2007-2011 between UNICEF and the State, the Dominican Republic will continue to endeavour to achieve the objectives of the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Montserrat Gil Torné, Minister of Health, Welfare, Family and Housing of Andorra.

Mrs. Gil Torné (Andorra) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to join in the expressions of condolences to the victims of the attack in Algeria this morning and their families.

The Principality of Andorra gives high priority to the rights of children in the development of our public policy. Six years ago, my country participated actively in the campaign "Say Yes for Children", and Andorra was represented at the highest level at the May 2002 special session of the General Assembly on children. Continuing to meet our commitment to the rights of children and our commitments to this Organization, I am pleased to announce the recent submission of our report on developments in Andorra covering the first five years of the strategy under "A world fit for children". The report includes important milestones in implementing this United Nations strategy, such as a law on children that is now being drawn up, as well as the drafting of a plan of action for children which has been elaborated with the assistance of the Andorra UNICEF Committee.

Other important steps have been taken by Andorra in protecting the rights of children. They are related to the four cross-cutting objectives set out in "A world fit for children". First, we are promoting healthy lifestyles. Encouraging nutritional health and physical exercise is one of the priorities on which we have focused in our country.

During the years 2004 and 2005 a number of surveys were carried out on child health and the nutritional habits of the Andorran population, as a result of which the Ministry of Health, Welfare, Family and Housing, together with the Ministry of Education, launched this year a strategy to promote healthy eating habits and exercise among children. One of the initial actions arising from this strategy was to disseminate educational materials to schools, libraries and institutions for young people. We expect that the strategy will be further developed during the coming five years.

Combating drug addiction, in particular among the youngest, is one of the major challenges in our societies. For that reason, we inaugurated in 2004 a national plan against drug addiction. Last year there was a considerable increase in the activities undertaken under the plan and a significant increase in the number of activities, including seminars and discussions between children and professionals working with them.

With regard to combating HIV/AIDS, Andorra has engaged in efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In 2004 we set up an anonymous registry to determine the number of existing cases of AIDS in Andorra. However, we know that prevention is key, in particular among young people. Therefore, last year the Ministry of Health, Welfare, Family and Housing, together with the Andorran UNICEF Committee and local youth departments, began a programme of public prevention campaigns. This year we have increased these efforts with the distribution of educational materials and the holding of seminars with groups that work with young people, such as teachers, instructors and sports coaches. The objective is for those individuals to develop the necessary capacities to respond to young people's questions concerning HIV/AIDS and thus help eliminate major taboos and false information concerning the disease.

Similarly, we have set up a webpage which, in clear and direct language, informs young people about the disease and provides them with a contact address which they can reach anonymously.

The Principality of Andorra has always promoted quality education and has always guaranteed schooling for all children up to the age of 16 years. The education law guarantees free and mandatory education between the ages of 6 and 16.

I am proud to report now that the entire population of children between the ages of 3 and 16 is attending school. I would also stress that the educational structure in Andorra is multidisciplinary. Three education systems make up the public education network: the Spanish education system, both religious and secular, the French education system and the Andorran education system.

Quality education must be the primary tool for protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence. In 2004, Andorra signed the Optional Protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in 2005 we reformed the penal code to bring it in line with the Optional Protocols. Among other measures, we set the age of 18 years as the age when one can be tried as an adult. We codified crimes such as child prostitution and pornography and established a policy for intervening in cases where minors are in danger which involves all individuals who come in contact with a minor who is at risk, including doctors, teachers, and personnel of childcare facilities and other institutions. We have also set up machinery for effective coordination.

Finally, we have established a specialized multidisciplinary team to insure protection for those minors who are in dangerous situations. In Andorra we have a population of 83,000 and overall we believe that working in teams and working closely together will provide greater protection for children living in risky situations.

Despite all of these developments, we must remain alert and not let our guard down. We must continue to work to insure the development of the Convention and the strategy and we must continually improve on existing mechanisms. Protecting the rights of children and building a world fit for children are goals which countries must never, ever fail to achieve.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Sophia Simba, Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Ms. Simba (United Republic of Tanzania): My delegation is pleased to participate in this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. We congratulate the President of the Assembly on the organization of the meeting and look forward to fruitful deliberations that will provide more insight into our quest to make a world fit for children a reality. We also wish to thank UNICEF for the support it has provided in the preparations for this meeting. We align ourselves with the statement delivered by Ms. Alima Mahama, Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Ghana, on behalf of the African Union.

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania attaches great importance to children's participation and consults children on various issues that affect them. In order to underscore that commitment, our delegation includes three children. We thus welcome the convening of the Children's Forum and the opportunity that is given to children to address the Assembly. It is imperative that we listen to children, involve them and address their needs and concerns together with them.

As we review the implementation of "A world fit for children", we are encouraged that overall some notable achievements have been made. Tanzania has made progress in the implementation of "A world fit for children". Some of our notable achievements include the increased enrolment of children and the attainment of gender parity in primary education. That has caused us to reach the Millennium Development Goal on education well before the target date of 2015. The health of children under 5 years of age has been improving as a result of several initiatives, including the provision of micronutrients, including vitamin A, implementation of child survival protection — a development programme — an expanded programme for immunization, the integrated management of childhood illnesses, the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, breastfeeding and malaria control and treatment.

The Government has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols — one on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, and the other on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The Government is in the process of enacting a comprehensive children's act that will insure that our international commitments on children are reflected in national legislation.

The enactment of improved legislation, such as the employment and labour relations act of 2004, that, among other things, incorporates International Labour Organization standards on abolishing the worst forms of child labour, has further improved the well-being and rights of children.

Poverty remains the underlying constraining factor in many of the unfavourable situations facing Tanzanian children, as well as in increasing their vulnerability. Breaking the cycle of poverty is therefore the critical factor and is the major challenge that has to be overcome in our quest to make Tanzania fit for children.

We have incorporated the goals and targets of our commitment to A world fit for children into the main text of Tanzania's national strategy for growth and reduction of poverty and the Zanzibar Strategy for the reduction of poverty. These are the overarching strategies for our national development planning and will insure that issues involving children are monitored and evaluated and that resources are provided for.

Violence against children, in particular, sexual exploitation and abuse, remain major concerns for our Government. Several measures to combat violence and sexual exploitation against children have been put in place, including the enactment of a sexual offenses special provision act, which provides punishment to perpetrators of sexual crimes and violence against children. We have also undertaken legislative and non-legislative efforts to protect children from work hazards and from the worst forms of child labour. Tanzania welcomes and supports the appointment of a Special Representative for Violence against Children. We believe that this will add new impetus to our global efforts to combat violence against children.

Despite the achievements, we are faced with numerous challenges before the rights of all children in Tanzania, in particular the poorest and most vulnerable, can be guaranteed. We reiterate the importance of international cooperation and call for international partnership and assistance, including debt forgiveness, to mobilize available resources to address the concerns of children and make the world, and indeed Tanzania, fit for children.

In Tanzania there is high political commitment on the part of its leadership to implement and achieve the goals and objectives of the A world fit for children. We note, however, that Governments alone cannot make the world fit for children. Partnerships and collaborative efforts at all levels with other Governments, local communities and non-governmental organizations and the private sector, as well as international organizations, are imperative in our endeavour to improve the well-being of children.

At this juncture, we wish to acknowledge with gratitude the support that we have received from our development partners, our friends and civil society organizations. We urge them to continue their support.

Finally, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania reaffirms its commitment to making the concept of a world, and indeed a Tanzania, fit for children a reality. We are ready and willing to work with the international community to that end. In this partnership, the role of the United Nations in providing a platform for advocacy, setting standards for the protection and advancement of children and mobilizing support is indispensable.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Virgilia Dos Santos Matabele, Minister for Women and Coordination of Social Affairs of Mozambique.

Ms. Dos Santos Matabele (Mozambique) (*spoke in Portuguese; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): At the outset, on behalf of the Republic of Mozambique and on my own account, I join previous speakers in expressing heartfelt condolences to the brotherly people of Algeria on the tragedy that struck their country this morning.

Mozambique's participation in this important meeting attests to its Government's renewed commitment to the lofty ideals of the United Nations and to continuing to strive to promote and protect children's rights. Mozambique has a population of approximately 21 million, 11 million of whom are children. To ensure the well-being of those children, the Mozambican Government has stepped up its efforts to ensure that they can fully exercise their rights.

In 2005, the new constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, which unequivocally protects children's rights, entered into force. The Government has adopted draft laws on the protection of children, on the organization of hostels for minors and on human trafficking. The adoption of the family law and of the civil registry code, which extends the deadline for registering family members free of charge, is also an example of our commitment in this area.

In the field of education, we are pleased to report an expansion in our school system network, an increase in school enrolment, particularly among girls, and an improvement in the quality of our education, achieved through the adoption of a strategy to make school environments child-friendly. The tuition exemption for primary school enrolment is one of the most important measures taken by the Mozambican Government to guarantee that all children have access to education.

In the area of health, there has been an improvement in access to health care by mothers and children as a result of the expansion of health care services, the increase in and enhancement of facilities for assisted childbirth, and additional comprehensive children's health-care services.

With regard to HIV/AIDS, we highlight significant advocacy efforts as well as initiatives to combat and prevent the stigmatization and discrimination associated with that disease. In 2005, we launched a global campaign to combat HIV/AIDS in order to enhance the progress already made.

Recently, the Mozambican Government approved a second report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which will soon be submitted to the United Nations.

As we assess the efforts made since the holding of the special session on children, we are encouraged by the success that has already been achieved. At the same time, we believe that we must redouble our efforts to achieve concrete results that will have an immediate impact on children's lives. We have a collective obligation to improve our cooperation through programmes that will enable us to guarantee the well-being of children so that they feel that they are an integral part of the community and that they own their future. We urge Governments and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to redouble their efforts to ensure the protection of children's rights, particularly the right to survival, protection and development, as well as children's participation in issues that directly concern them.

To conclude, I should like to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Mozambique to intensify its efforts to ensure that all Mozambican children will some day realize their dream to live, play and study in a world of peace and prosperity, free of hunger, poverty, deprivation and illiteracy; a world where there is no lack of schools, hospitals, drinking water and housing; a world without violence, sexual abuse of minors and exploitation. In that way, our children will be able to grow up in a world increasingly fit for children.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Victorina Espínola de Ruiz Díaz, Minister of Childhood and Adolescents of Paraguay.

Ms. Espínola de Ruiz Díaz (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the basis for Paraguay's national goals as contained in our 2001 plan for growth with equity and our national strategy to reduce poverty and inequality. Paraguay has formulated its national policy for children and adolescents with the participation of society and because of the need to eradicate poverty and inequality by promoting and guaranteeing social mobilization to combat the structural causes of poverty. That requires that the State play a different role aimed at guaranteeing acceptable levels of quality in providing services, so as to implement the strategies set out in the national plan of action for children.

We also have two sectoral plans: a national plan to prevent and eradicate child labour and to protect adolescents in the workplace, and a national plan to prevent and eradicate the sexual exploitation of boy and girl children and adolescents, both adopted by decree. We also have a list of dangerous forms of child labour, supplementing Law No. 1657/01, of 2001, through which the Republic of Paraguay ratified Convention No. 182 of the International Labour Organization.

On 31 May every year, Paraguay observes a national day against child and adolescent abuse, sexual abuse and labour. Likewise, in 2006 we adopted Law 2861/06, which suppresses the trade in and the commercial or non-commercial dissemination of pornographic material using images or other representations of minors or disabled persons. We have also adopted Law 3156/06, which modifies articles 51 and 55 of Law 1266/87, on civil registry, to permit the free and universal registration of children within the framework of the national registry and identity card plan in order to eliminate existing barriers. Thus, children can exercise their right to an identity and thus to a name, a family and a nationality and their right to be proud Paraguayans.

The principles established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are the underpinnings of article 54 of the national constitution currently in force, which establishes that the family, the society and the State have the obligation to guarantee that children develop in a harmonious and comprehensive fashion, and that they can fully enjoy their rights.

The national system to fully protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents is part of a well-coordinated group of competent bodies charged with preparing and monitoring the implementation of the national policy to ensure the full enjoyment of rights for children and adolescents in Paraguay. This system governs and brings together programmes and actions at the national, departmental and municipal levels in accordance with Law 1680/01: the Code on Children and Adolescents.

One important aspect is the participation of children and adolescents in matters concerning the exercise and enjoyment of their rights through national, departmental and municipal councils for children and adolescents, through international congresses and national, departmental and municipal forums, whether as members of each one of these bodies or as part of the Latin American Network for Children and Adolescents. One of the strategies established in the national policy of action for children is strategic alliances to involve civil society and non-governmental organizations, and to bring about international cooperation in order to meet the central challenge of improving the living conditions of Paraguayans by sustainably increasing investment in social programmes in 2006. That is how projected investments in social programmes for 2008 correspond to 50 per cent of the country's general public expenditure budget.

The implementation of programmes for children and adolescents set up by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Well-being is well under way. This includes a programme for integrated care of prevalent childhood illnesses, which involves aspects relating to the growth and development of children, and an expanded immunization programme. This makes it possible for Paraguay to fulfil its commitment with respect to the indicators set forth in the MDGs with regard to reducing infant and maternal mortality rates. We also hope to provide 95 per cent coverage in our national vaccination plan. Similarly, maternal mortality is being dealt with through a national sexual health and reproductive plan which has the strategic objective of improving the sexual and reproductive health of the Paraguayan population through comprehensive and sustainable policies, programmes and projects that ensure comprehensive care for the individual and the community, focusing on rights, quality, gender and equality. Within the framework of this plan, we have begun implementing the "Safe motherhood" programme, which focuses on family planning as well as on the provision of birthing kits.

In order to ensure environmental sustainability, we have two goals related to the environment involving water and sanitation. We are also focusing on combating HIV/AIDS. National efforts both in the public sector and in organized civil society have focused on improving access to antiretroviral therapy and widening its coverage. The Ministry of Public Health and Social Well-being's national programme to combat AIDS provides investment in prevention, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up, with antiretroviral therapy and prevention being important aspects of meeting this challenge.

I must also mention the Paraguay chapter of the I Love Life coalition, which complements the worldwide Lessons for Life and Saving Lives campaigns, and which incorporates Paraguayan State organizations, non-governmental organizations, churches, civil society, businesses and the cooperation of the United Nations system. The goal here is to implement the 1x100 programme, an educational strategy for couples to set up networks with multiple juvenile agents. This constitutes one of the central axes of the country's strategy to prevent HIV/AIDS.

With regard to actions aimed at promoting quality education in order to achieve universal primary education, the Ministry of Education and Culture has set as a State policy the goal of guaranteeing an increase in the enrolment of children in preschool, primary and middle school. Another relevant objective proposed by the Paraguayan Government has been to eradicate illiteracy among members of the population aged 15 and above, with a view to developing actions provided for in the National Literacy Plan 2004-2008.

The Ministry of Education and Culture is implementing education reform as a State policy by increasing attendance at preschool, primary and middle school levels — which in rural regions largely exceeds attendance in urban areas — as a result of the requests of families and communities, it being the case that the greatest percentage of the school population is taken care of by public sector institutions.

I would also mention that there is increased attendance in the education system that has permitted us to raise the average number of years of studies and to reduce illiteracy rates, thereby meeting the following principal challenges: making preschool and third-cycle primary school attendance universal; sustainably increasing the provision of middle school education; reducing the repeat rate, especially at the primary school level; reducing the dropout rate in the third cycle of primary school and in middle school; increasing student retention and performance; improving quality, efficiency and fairness in the education being offered, at all levels.

Another important aspect is gender equality among the literate population as well as programmes that contribute to the improvement of conditions for educating boys and girls in the neediest sectors.

With regard to providing protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, Paraguay is developing actions to raise awareness of violence on the public agenda and to promote thereby a culture of proper treatment, in accordance with human rights standards for children and adolescents, and by implementing programmes that focus on sensitization and awareness in the family, schools and the community.

We have strengthened networks to provide timely, respectful, efficient and comprehensive care in order to fundamentally avoid repeat victimization in all cases. We have also set up a programme called Fono Ayuda — Phone Help — which provides girls, boys and adolescents with free telephone counselling specializing in psychological and legal advice in the event of mistreatment, sexual abuse, sexual or labour exploitation and other violations of children's rights, as well as lending them a sympathetic ear in the face of concerns arising from their experience of daily life.

By agreement with some international organizations, we have also set up a web page, *www.paraguayosdesaparecidos.com*, to facilitate the search for Paraguayans who have disappeared, and have organized a campaign called "Red Card for Abusers". All of this has been done in collaboration with civil society and international cooperation, particularly with the United Nations system, in which the constantly present cooperation of UNICEF is noteworthy. Similarly, we have implemented programmes in various cities to prevent and provide comprehensive care for children and adolescents who have been victims of sexual commercial child exploitation. We have set up national and community networks for protection against mistreatment and all other types of child abuse.

Challenges have determined the design of employment policies and economic growth and resulted in greater provision of resources to highly vulnerable sectors such as indigenous groups and rural populations. We have been able to measure efficiency and better manage our priority programmes while assessing the resulting impact in accordance with Paraguay's commitment to continue to progress in its development of policies, plans, projects and programmes that respond efficiently to the challenge of guaranteeing the rights of children. At the same time, my country is insuring comprehensive development, equality, health care, education and social protection with the aim of building a Paraguay that is fit for children and adolescents.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Hajia Saudatu Bungudu, Minister of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Nigeria.

Ms. Bungudu (Nigeria): Before I deliver my statement, may I, on behalf on the Government and the people of Nigeria, express Nigeria's deepest sympathy to the people of Algeria over the bomb blast that brought the lives of many innocent Algerians to their untimely end. May the souls of the departed rest in peace.

It has indeed been a delight to see the President of the General Assembly presiding over this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. On behalf of the Government and People of Nigeria, I congratulate Mr. Kerim and the entire Bureau on their election to guide the affairs of the Assembly. I am convinced that, with Mr. Kerim's undoubtedly rich experience and competence, he and the Bureau will bring the entire proceedings of this special meeting to a successful outcome.

My statement will focus essentially on the agenda items before this special meeting on children. Naturally, the thrust of our deliberations is germane to me as a mother. My delegation aligns itself with the thrust of the African perspectives on children, presented earlier by Her Excellency Alima Mahama, Minister for Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Ghana, who ably represented the Chairman of the African Union.

Nigeria believes that the future survival of mankind depends on how effectively Governments implement programmes and policies aimed at safeguarding, nurturing, educating and protecting children from the cradle up to adolescence. Indeed, that was why Nigeria joined other Member States to adopt a Declaration and Plan of Action on the overall well-being and protection of the rights of children at the World Summit for Children in 1990.

Nigeria also reaffirmed its commitment to the emergence of a world fit for children and the strategic goals which were mapped out at the World Summit for Children to improve the situation of children all over the world. At the regional level, Nigeria is not only a signatory to the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child but also espouses the African Common Position on an Africa fit for children.

Nigeria has demonstrated its resolve to achieve the goals spelt out in the outcome document by assimilating the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its national laws with the adoption of the Nigerian Child Rights Act in July 2003. Nineteen out of the 36 states of the Federation have adopted the Child Rights Act. A number of states have also enacted specific laws for the protection of the rights of children. The Child's Rights Act has also been simplified and translated into major Nigerian languages for ease of advocacy and dissemination. Moreover, the Millennium Development Goals have been incorporated into Nigeria's medium term development plan, which we call NEEDS. These initiatives envision a sustainably improved condition for the Nigerian child now and in the future.

With regard to children's access to education, a universal basic education project has been relaunched. Completion rates in primary schools have increased, reaching 94 per cent in 2004. Compulsory basic education has also been extended to include junior secondary schools.

With regard to the HIV/AIDS scourge, Nigeria's commitment to confront this pandemic is unquestioned. The country launched a global campaign in November 2005 entitled Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS, in order to refocus the global AIDS agenda on children. This initiative has provided another platform for urgent and sustained programmes, advocacy and fund-raising to limit the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and halt the spread of the disease. Indeed, the campaign provided a child-focus framework for country-level programmes that are currently making a difference in the lives and life expectancy rates of children affected by HIV/AIDS. Nigeria is currently in the process of enacting legislation to make stigmatization, discrimination and the violation of the human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS an offence punishable in law.

A national plan of action on orphans and vulnerable children, based on the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" has been launched. The Government is partnering with international development agencies and other stakeholders to provide health care and educational support for orphans and vulnerable children in the country. A conditional cash transfer system also ensures that children from poor families have access to basic education.

Nigeria is in partnership with United Nations agencies and other stakeholders to implement the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children. The study is being disseminated to civil society to ensure a multidimensional approach to confronting violence against children. Law enforcement capacity is being enhanced to enable law enforcement agents to handle cases involving children in conflict with the law.

To stem the tide of child trafficking, Nigeria enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act of 2003. The law also established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, which is charged with the responsibility to check the scourge of human trafficking and child labour. Nigeria has entered into bilateral and multilateral agreements to curb cross-border trafficking in children.

With regard to the necessity of involving children in matters concerning them, the national Children's Parliament, which was inaugurated in 2000, has been replicated in all the states of the Federation and in the Federal Capital Territory. This platform ensures that children are able to participate in national, regional and international discourse and programmes about their survival and development and the protection of their human rights and security.

That progress notwithstanding, the Government is still faced with numerous challenges. A few examples must suffice here, due to time constraints: unacceptably high infant mortality and under-five mortality rates; poverty and its after-effects; the challenge of providing infrastructure for universal basic education and junior secondary school; child and baby trafficking; the challenge of HIV/AIDS and its debilitating consequences; and the challenge of logistics support and technical assistance.

Finally, my Government hereby calls on the international community and development partners to foster ever-closer partnerships with all States Members of the United Nations to monitor progress made since the 2002 special session on Children. This would certainly enable us to offer a scaled-up response to the maximum extent possible. Our gratitude goes to our development partner agencies and the relevant United Nations organizations, and particularly UNICEF, for their collaboration with Nigeria on questions relating to children. Of course, it goes without saying that attaining the goals of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015 on the one hand and attaining the targets set in "A world fit for children" on the other are mutually reinforcing. Let us seek practical and urgent solutions to the problems confronting our children. That way, we shall really be constructing a world truly fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ith Sam Heng, Minister of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation of Cambodia.

Mr. Sam Heng (Cambodia): On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia, I wish to express our great pleasure at being here to exchange experiences in implementing the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action (resolution S-27/2, annex). I also express thanks to the General Assembly, the United Nations and UNICEF for their efforts in arranging this meeting.

The four fundamental rights of the child have been stated in the political platform of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Children's issues have been promoted at national and community levels by the strengthening activities of child protection networks to support vulnerable children, as reflected in Cambodia's national and sectoral plans and in the "A Cambodia Fit for Children" document, in order to achieve the Cambodia millennium development goals and the "A world fit for children" goals.

I will list some of the results here. In promoting healthy lives, from 2000 to 2005, there has been a sharp decline in infant and under-five mortality rates, from 95 to 66 and from 124 to 83 per 1,000 births respectively, and in total fertility, from 4 to 3.4. The proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel and antenatal care coverage have both increased. Household access to safe water increased and iodized salt use have increased, by 16 per cent and 59 per cent respectively.

In providing quality education, improvements have been made in literacy, admission rates and primary school survival rates. The primary net enrolment rate is 91.3 per cent. The net enrolment rate for lower secondary school is 31.3 per cent; the ninth grade survival rate is 26.5 per cent; and the number of children aged 6 to 14 still out of school decreased by 7 per cent. Gender disparities in education have shown improvement. There has been an increase in the ratio of girls to boys in primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education and the tertiary level.

In combating HIV/AIDS, the adult HIV rate has decreased from 3 per cent to less than 1 per cent; HIV counseling and testing services have expanded from 35 to 106 sites; and centres offering services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission have increased in number from 2 to 54.

In protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence, in 2004, 90 per cent birth registration had been achieved. Victimized children have been provided protection, rehabilitation and legal representation. Also, there has been an increase in the number of annual arrests of suspected sex traffickers, and of victims rescued.

Landmine awareness campaigns have resulted in a decrease in casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance from 850 to 450, of which 30 per cent are children.

In summary, although Cambodia is making progress, it still faces challenges in areas related to food security, poverty reduction, education survival rates, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, gender mainstreaming and child protection. Thus, in order to accomplish the Cambodia millennium development goals by 2015 and to realize a Cambodia fit for children, Cambodia must strengthen and accelerate national efforts in these areas in cooperation with international and local partners.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

United Nations A/62/PV.68

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

68th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 11 December 2007, 6 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim .... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mavroyiannis (Cyprus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m.

Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children

Agenda item 66 (*continued*)

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hendrik Setrowidjojo, Minister of Social Affairs and Housing of Suriname.

Mr. Setrowidjojo (Suriname): The Government of Suriname would like to express its sympathy to the Government and people of Algeria and the United Nations family on the tragedy that took place today in Algeria.

My delegation is honoured to address the General Assembly at this special occasion, at which the international community reviews progress made towards achieving the goals set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children", adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly in 2002.

We express our gratitude to the President of the General Assembly for the preparations for this meeting, and we also wish to extend gratitude to the United Nations system for its valuable support in assuring that this meeting becomes a success.

I would like to associate myself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bahamas speaking on behalf of the members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

In 2002, all participating countries committed themselves to realizing the goals set forth in the outcome document of the special session for children. That commitment was necessary in order to guarantee that children have a stable environment in which their capabilities are evolved and stimulated into full development.

We have now arrived at the critical juncture at which, five years later we are to review the progress that has been made. The Government of Suriname, aware of the fact that children are the future of humanity, has dedicated the past five years to revising, formulating and implementing policies and programmes for children. That process was conducted in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations and international donors working for and with children, as well as with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies. Specific policy interventions have been formulated in the areas of health, education, legal protection, people with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, early

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

childhood development and sexual and reproductive health.

Please allow me to inform the Assembly on the modest achievements made in areas affecting the well-being and rights of children in Suriname.

The immunization coverage increased from 70 per cent in 2000 to 85 per cent in 2004. In 2005, a new immunization scheme, including Hib and hepatitis B vaccine, was introduced. Infant mortality remained stable during the period 2000-2004 at around 20 per 1,000 live births. Enrolment in preschool and primary school increased, and the latter programme was seen to completion. Yet a significant challenge remains the fact that there has been a decrease in the percentage of children completing secondary education.

Other achievements concern the improvement of the birth registration system and the provision of primary and secondary health care to disadvantaged groups in our society, such as people with low income and older persons, almost free of charge. We have, furthermore, registered gains in the fight against malaria, which resulted in a decrease in the number of malaria cases by 75 per cent in 2006.

It is also noteworthy to mention legislative reforms, particularly in relation to children's right to develop parental relations with both parents in case of divorce; yet to be approved is legislation with regard to the rights of children to be consulted in matters that are of importance to them.

Children and young people have also been involved in exercising their right to participation. In that context, a youth parliament was instituted, providing a forum for young people to discuss issues that are of concern to them. There is also a national advisory board in which two CARICOM youth ambassadors are represented. The Government further executed a multiple indicators cluster survey in 2006, which will result in the availability of important data on the situation of children.

Notwithstanding the progress made, we have to be cognizant of the fact that much more remains to be done to fulfil the lofty promises made to children and truly build a world fit for them. As long as children are deprived of basic education and health care, and as long as children are living in poverty and continue to suffer from violence and abuse committed by those who are supposed to protect them, we will still have a long way to go.

In that regard, it is of crucial importance to scale up resources to improve the situation of children worldwide, as well as to increase capacity-building, especially in developing countries. Of equal importance is enhanced international cooperation to complement national initiatives and the forging of true partnerships.

In closing, let me stress that it is time to transform our words into actions. The declaration that will be adopted at the closing of tomorrow's meeting should inspire us more than ever to redouble our efforts to create a world truly fit for children. We can ill afford to fail our future generations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Kandeh Musa, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone.

Ms. Musa (Sierra Leone): As a member of the African Union, Sierra Leone associates itself with the statement delivered by the Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Ghana, presenting the Call for Accelerated Action on the Implementation of the Plan of Action towards Africa Fit for Children, as mandated by the Second Pan-African Forum on Children held in Cairo, Egypt, from 29 October to 2 November 2007.

As we meet with the global fraternity of nations in this commemorative plenary of the General Assembly to evaluate the progress achieved thus far in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children", Sierra Leone is pleased to note that so much has been achieved by individual nations and organizations towards to the advancement and welfare of children, evident in the words of the draft declaration, which my delegation hopes will be adopted by consensus at the end of this meeting.

Our strong commitment to the welfare of children is demonstrated by the fact that Sierra Leone is a State party to all the relevant international human rights instruments dedicated to the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of children, including the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children".

Children's concerns have been mainstreamed into our national development policies, programmes and plans, as underlined by the creation of a special Ministry of Children's Affairs, which I have the privilege to head as Minister. Children's concerns are also addressed in our national poverty reduction strategy paper. Consistent with these commitments, Sierra Leone has taken and continues to take practical measures towards the promotion of the rights and welfare of children, especially in relation to the four outcome areas of "A world fit for children" plan of action, namely: health, education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, as well as combating HIV/AIDS.

In our bid to attain the objective of promoting healthy lives for the children of Sierra Leone, the right of every child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health has been a major priority for my Government. In this regard, we have taken initiatives, all of which are consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing by half the proportion of people living without sustainable safe drinking water by 2015 and reducing infant mortality. There are extensive programmes to enhance maternal health and reduce infant mortality and morbidity rates including immunizations, family planning, obstetric care and training of traditional birth attendants.

Under the Roll Back Malaria Programme, we have embarked upon a massive malaria control campaign, which has benefited from generous funding and technical support from United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF and other international funding operations. Through this programme, about 900,000 insecticide treated mosquito nets have been distributed to pregnant women and children under 5 years of age.

In the area of providing quality education, a premium has been placed on having every child attend school. The Government has introduced free and compulsory primary education and created special incentives for promoting the education of the girl child. This has led to significantly higher primary school enrolment, particularly the enrolment of girls at all levels. We have also modified some of our national education programmes to provide opportunities for war-affected children aged 10 to 15 whose schooling was disrupted or who never attended school.

Through a programme known as Complementary Rapid Education for Primary School, the normal six-year primary education programme was compressed to three years in a bid to encourage beneficiaries to eventually join the formal education system. About 23,000 children have successfully gone through the programme and integrated into the formal education system thanks to UNICEF.

With regard to the issue of protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, a number of practical measures have been taken to address vulnerabilities of specific categories of children. A National Commission for War-Affected Children was established soon after our civil war to focus on the needs of children, including reunification with their families, fostering and trauma healing. The Government also adopted a declaration by which 18 years became the minimum age for recruitment into the national army. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to provide, among other things, a forum for children associated with the war to tell their stories during the hearings of the Commission. Details of these stories provided a wealth of information about children and their vulnerabilities. These stories have also contributed to shaping our policies on children's welfare. The recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, especially those related to the protection of the rights and advancement of the welfare of children, are now being implemented.

On the subject of employment law, it is now prohibited for women and girls of any age to work in mines and also for children under 18 years of age to be employed at night in any private or public undertaking. The law also prohibits male children below age 16 from working underground in mines.

In June 2007, a child rights bill was enacted in Sierra Leone to ensure the proper implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Concurrently, the Government is working with various child protection civil society organizations, religious bodies and UNICEF to support programmes to take children off the streets, especially child peddlers. A head count of street children in major urban areas estimates the number at 2,874. This demonstrates that there is a lot more to be done.

Also established are a well-functioning Child Protection Committee headed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and child friendly centres established by the National Commission for War Affected Children and religious organizations in various parts of the country to take care of vulnerable children.

To further address the needs of our children, a Trafficking in Persons Act was enacted in 2005 and a Trafficking in Persons Task Force, and a National Orphans and Vulnerable Children Task Force were established. We have also set up a Family Support Unit in the Police Department to protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation. There are about 18 Family Support Unit branches around the country. Social workers from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have been assigned to branches of the Unit nationwide.

In the area of combating HIV/AIDS, we have taken measures to ensure that our children are protected against that monstrous scourge. We have thus developed policies and guidelines such as support for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV as well as paediatric care.

In spite of all the gains I have described, we must still express our concern that the condition of the children of Sierra Leone remains precarious. If we should meet all the targets set out in the "A world fit for children" declaration and plan of action, we have yet to address such challenges as special care for children orphaned by AIDS, the increasing number of street children, inadequate health and education facilities for children in remote communities and poor infrastructure, as well as the lack of trained personnel to tackle the problem of trafficking in persons.

Much as our success in achieving "A world fit for children" targets depends to a very large extent on our national efforts, there is still need for continued international support specifically to help us meet the Millennium Development Goals, which have a great bearing on the welfare of children.

In conclusion, allow me, on behalf of my President, His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, the Government and the people of Sierra Leone, to thank the United Nations, especially UNICEF, for bringing us all together in this high level plenary meeting. I must also thank our development partners for their continued support to ensure we fulfil our commitments as enunciated in the "A world fit for children" declaration and plan of action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols.

Finally, we reiterate our firm commitment to the ongoing global efforts at making a world fit, not only for the children of Sierra Leone but also a world fit for children the world over.

Sierra Leone joins nations here in expressing condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria in the wake of today's tragedy.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Cecilia Landereche Gómez Morín, Director, National System for Integral Development of the Family of Mexico.

Ms. Landereche Gómez Morín (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before beginning my statement, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the help Mexico received when, less than two months ago, my country suffered one of its worse natural catastrophes in the States of Tabasco and Chiapas. On behalf of the people of Mexico, I would like to express my thanks for the generous assistance that we have received and continue to receive from different parts of the world, as well as for the extraordinary support given by the United Nations. Mexico acknowledges the expressions of solidarity in these difficult times, and similarly we would also like to declare our solidarity with Algeria after the serious attacks that occurred this morning.

Mexico's experience following the adoption the document "A world fit for children" led to the development of a national programme entitled "A Mexico fit for children and adolescents". With this plan of action, the Mexican Government took up the 21 goals agreed upon at that Assembly and adapted them to the needs and specificities of our country.

In order to discuss the achievements of the last few years and the challenges for the future, it is important to understand that Mexico is a multicultural mosaic: more than 70 indigenous languages are spoken there, and more than 7 million people use them on a daily basis. The indigenous populations have their own usages and customs; some designate their own authorities in accordance with their cosmic vision. The federal Government respects their forms of social and political organization.

This cultural wealth requires a comprehensive vision in the design and implementation of public policies. For many years now, the Government of Mexico has tackled problems relating to children with programmes that are adapted to all the social categories and populations that make up our country.

As part of our free education programme for the school year 2007-2008, we distributed 250 million textbooks cost-free and published almost 150 titles in more than 50 indigenous languages for more than 600,000 students who receive primary education in their mother tongue.

In the area of nutrition, the programme of school breakfasts, which began almost 80 years ago, is a fundamental strategy of nutritional support for proper learning. On a daily basis, we serve more than 5 million breakfasts to our children with the participation of municipalities, schools and parents.

For the Mexican Government, the basis of all our efforts in the area of children is the family, which is why we are trying to combat vulnerability with programmes that begin and end in the family. Thus, we have streamlined adoption processes in the belief that one of the most important prevention strategies is to ensure that all children can live within a family. We have promoted actions at the level of the federal Government, in cooperation with other Government authorities, to guarantee that adoption serves the interests of the child. In other words, we seek a family for a child, not a child for a family.

We recognize the need to improve the conditions of the growing number of working mothers and their children. Since the inauguration of the new Government in December 2006, we have already opened 5,000 childcare centres that serve 100,000 boys and girls. We have also invested resources to enhance the quality of the centres that already existed. Thanks to them, many families have managed to overcome their hereditary levels of poverty. Boys and girls also receive attention, including before preschool age, and thus have a future with more opportunities for development.

In the area of health, one of the most important policies this year has been "Health insurance for a new generation", a programme aimed at providing health services to all newborns as of 1 December 2006 whose families do not have social security coverage.

More specifically, I would like to emphasize the establishment of the National Council for Children and Adolescents, which follows up on the national goals of the Programme of Action 2002-2010 and works in coordination with the main public, private and social actors, as well as with children and youth. The Council currently publishing a report on the progress Mexico has achieved in each of 21 target areas.

According to the latest assessment published by the National Council in 2006 in the area of protection against all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, Mexico has established some 30 programmes that have provided excellent results. For example, child labour has been reduced by 25.3 per cent compared to the year 2000 and the number of children who attend school has increased by 40.9 per cent. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 has also declined substantially, with a reduction of 33 per cent between 2000 and 2005.

However, in the area of education and health, there are still certain challenges. From the year 2000, we only reduced to 23 per cent the rates of malnutrition among children under the age of 5. Although we increased preschool coverage from 75.7 per cent to 99.7 per cent, we have only managed to increase school enrolment by 0.4 per cent. Unfortunately, many of our children do not complete their primary education.

We still have problems in the area of maternal and infant mortality. From 1990 to 2000, we managed a reduction from 89 out of 1,000 live births to 18.2 out of 1,000 live births. But our goal for the year 2010 is to reach 12 per 1,000 live births, though so far we have only managed a reduction to 16.2 per 1,000 live births.

Generally speaking, we can say that Mexico is on the right track. We have a system of indicators that makes it possible to continuously assess the impact of our programmes. Currently, we have only three areas of difficulty and three indicating that we must procede cautiously. However, for the 15 remaining goals, there appears to be no obstacles to success. We are sure that we can reach them by 2010.

To conclude, I would like to bring to the Assembly's consideration a topic that is extremely important for the delegation of Mexico and which, in our opinion, should play a central role in the international agenda of "A world fit for children". I am referring to the inclusion of the media. As the most important disseminators of culture, they accompany our daily lives, especially the lives of children. The delegation of Mexico sees the media as crucial instruments in the promotion among our new generations of respect for human rights, peace and the care of the environment.

There is no doubt, as always, that pooling our efforts and our will in forums such as this will be crucial for the commitment to building a world fit for children.

The Acting President: The next speaker is Her Excellency Ms. Nouara Saadia Djaafar, Minister Delegate in charge of Family and Female Condition of Algeria.

(*spoke in French*)

Before I give Ms. Djaafar the floor, I would like to convey to her and through her to the Government and the people of Algeria the deepest sadness and pain felt by the members of the General Assembly over the terrible event that has taken place in her country following the explosions in Algiers this morning and for the tragic victims of this event. I would ask her to accept our most sincere condolences and our deepest sympathy.

Ms. Djaafar (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I am honoured to express my deepest thanks to the Acting President and to all those who have conveyed their condolences and expressed their solidarity and their sympathy with the Algerian people following the cowardly terrorist attack that took place so brutally in my country today.

The special session of 2002 conducted an in-depth evaluation of the previous period, and we were able to establish clear-cut objectives on the basis of that evaluation. Today, we are conducting a follow-up to the outcome of that special session. First, we should focus on the brilliant consensus achieved on behalf of children throughout the world which has allowed for a better understanding of issues involving them and include them in ongoing international activities, such as combating poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The consensus has also enabled us to undertake international action in specific areas pertaining to children, such as violence against children worldwide. An important study on the subject provided us the opportunity to get a better idea of certain phenomena involving the protection of children in various regions of the world and to continue efforts to mobilize our potential on a global basis. We hope that these initiatives will continue.

We are acting with and on behalf of children; attempting to ensure concrete results for them and to achieve a world fit for children in our countries. Allow me briefly to provide Member States with an idea of what my country has done in this area, since today we are here to evaluate the activities of nations on behalf of children.

Children in Algeria have seen progress in several areas since 2000. Various integrated development programmes since 2000 have involved 2001-2004 economic rehabilitation efforts and a similar programme for the period 2005-2009. We are acting to ensure equality for all citizens in all regions. We have established two additional programmes for children, one for our southern provinces and the other for the higher plateau regions. These wide-scale programmes have created an environment which encouraged improvement in people's lives and elaborated infrastructures and services for development, modernized technology and established a new economic and social dynamism in the country.

Algeria has adopted a decisive strategy to put an end to foreign indebtedness and to fight unemployment in order to enhance development. We have also established special pioneering programmes to strengthen needy families and combat poverty throughout various regions to consolidate investment projects for small and medium-sized enterprises and establish national programmes for rural and agricultural development. All these programmes and strategies have enabled us to ensure a greater availability of resources to achieve social and economic objectives for children and their families. These are important activities which relate to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in the area of education.

We have achieved progress towards establishing partnerships for children by strengthening common action for children's education and establishing linkages with civil society, the mass media and parliamentarians. The next stage is to involve the private sector, with the help of international organizations such as UNICEF. When we strive for such accomplishments for children, we act at the appropriate level in order to address their concerns and we have been able to appreciate the serious-mindedness of this initiative through all the activities we have conducted nationally for children.

Within the framework of such a positive environment, we have introduced new activities for children through sectoral programmes, including health, reproductive health, improvement of health services for children and their families, and strengthening mother and child protection programmes. We also have programmes to combat child maternal mortality through national programmes that are both prenatal and postnatal in nature, as well as activities to improve education, including the introduction of reforms in the education system, in curricula and methods of teaching and in caring for younger children and their social lives.

In Algeria, there are about 8 million children, aged 6 to 16, attending school. We have a strong legal system to protect children, which has developed gradually since our first years of independence and has strengthened as part of the comprehensive reform of the justice system adopted by our country. We have elaborated a draft law for the protection of children which was approved by the Government which strengthens already existing protection.

Algeria has established a national strategy to combat violence against children as part of a study undertaken by the United Nations Secretary-General to combat violence against children throughout the world. In this regard, a national plan for children to achieve a new Algeria fit for children was carried out with the assistance of all ministerial sectors and national organizations working with children, community organizations and the mass media. Children themselves, especially young adults, have also been involved with the development of national priorities on the subject of children within a period that extends to the year 2015.

The period for activities set out in "A world fit for children" compels us to learn lessons for the future, and our State commits itself to promote the rights of the child, with the participation of all influential elements of society dealing effectively with children. This is a key commitment of our Government to ensure security, protection and basic services such as education, health, safe environment and extracurricular activities to bring up a child properly. This is part of our national development strategy. We cannot achieve proper childhood in a needy environment. We are acting to meet our commitments to children as part of the MDGs, and we should renew such commitments to children who are experiencing difficult conditions, especially those in Africa.

Acting for children requires that we work with children and that we begin to apply the principle of participation from the outset. This is a consensual horizontal action in which all stakeholders participate. It requires that we find an appropriate framework for constant action. Action on behalf of children is something that is forward-looking; it involves the family, its stability and the protection of the family unit. We will continue to act to consolidate the family and its stability, and to ensure the necessary resources for the growth of children, thus enabling families to carry out their basic mission as the essential element of society.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Shahida Jamil, Federal Minister for Women, Development, Social Welfare and Special Education of Pakistan.

Ms. Jamil (Pakistan): At the outset, let me express my felicitations to the President of the General Assembly on successfully convening this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. I also take this opportunity to welcome the launch of the Secretary-General's report on progress towards the goals of the final document, entitled "A world fit for children".

The report provides a comprehensive review of the progress made during the past five years in four priority areas of the final document: reducing child and maternal mortality and malnutrition; ensuring universal primary education; protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS.

Since the World Summit for Children in 1990, followed by the twenty-seventh special session on children in 2002, the international community has come a long way in strengthening its commitments to children. More children are now getting proper education, health facilities, nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, shelter and care.

The full realization of our commitments to promoting and protecting children's rights, however, is still far from being achieved. Challenges of inequality, poverty, discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race or religion, majority against minority, and migrant children still persist. Children and adolescents affected by natural disasters, living under foreign occupation, or facing internal or external displacement are deprived of their childhood and particularly vulnerable to violence, sexual exploitation, HIV infection, forced labour and slavery.

There is growing evidence that children are victimized by violence in their homes, schools, workplaces and communities the world over. The violation of child rights has serious and life-long repercussions. The problem is pervasive and its presence is spread across geographical, cultural, religious and socioeconomic boundaries. Ignorance and denial of violence against children have perpetuated that abuse and protected the perpetrators.

In order to translate the goals of the World Summit for Children into reality, a national programme of action was developed by the Government of Pakistan in 1990s and later reviewed before the General Assembly's special session on children in 2002. Now the Government of Pakistan is preparing, with the cooperation of UNICEF, a national child policy and plan of action for the next decade through a consultative and participatory process of all key stakeholders. Similar plans are also under preparation at the provincial, regional and district levels.

The right to education of the child is one of the priority areas for Pakistan. With continued emphasis on education by successive Governments, the net enrolment rate for primary schools increased to 52 per cent in 2005-2006, as compared to 42 per cent in 2001-2002. The Government has recently accorded approval to an education-sector reform strategy to address quality education for children. Special education for special children is an emerging subject in Pakistan, and 49 special education centres have been established in the main cities.

Pakistan has been particularly cognizant of the fact that children are more vulnerable to the phenomenon of violence. One of the major developments in that regard is the preparation of a national plan of action to combat child abuse and sexual exploitation, in line with the Stockholm Declaration and Plan of Action. In July 2006 in Islamabad, Pakistan also hosted the first meeting of the South Asia Forum for ending violence against children, which resulted in the adoption of a South Asian regional strategy to combat the sexual abuse of children in South Asian countries.

At the domestic level, a national child protection bill is being prepared to address all issues of child protection, violence and sexual abuse in a more comprehensive manner. A study for reviewing national laws to prevent and control child and women trafficking is also under way. It will help in combating the menace of the traffic in children and women who are trafficked for the purposes of prostitution, child labour, the begging and organ trades, slavery or bonded labour.

Our primary duty towards children to ensure their healthy survival cannot be overemphasized. In the area of child health, Pakistan is fully aware of the extraordinary burden of preventable deaths and morbidity among women and children, and is fully committed to improving their health status. Pakistan stands in the list of those few developing countries that have mainstreamed non-communicable diseases and injuries in their public health agendas.

Maternal and child health is a very crucial component of our national health policy and the Millennium Development Goals. In that context, the Ministry of Health has planned a major maternal and child health programme. A strategic plan on maternal and child health, amounting to 19.5 billion rupees, was launched in 2006 with the targets of reducing the under-five mortality rate to less than 65 per 1,000 live births and the newborn mortality rate to less than 40 per 1,000 live births by the year 2011.

Recent research has proved that marriage and family are irreplaceable institutions and that men, women and children achieve the greatest happiness, health and well-being in stable and intact families. The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the responsibility of both parents and the whole family for the well-being and care of the child. Unfortunately, millions of children around the world are growing up without one or both of their parents due to poverty, disability, disease, natural disasters, family breakdown and divorce. The welfare of children and the institution of the family are accorded a special place in Pakistan's State policies and Constitution, as children have always been the focus of our attention.

Finally, I hope that, by gathering at this High-level Meeting, we have once again reaffirmed, strengthened and voiced more forcibly the call of all children. We should pay greater attention and minimize the grievances of all children in all situations, including those facing violence, sexual abuse, war, conflicts, natural disasters, internal displacement and prolonged foreign occupation. I hope that we join the global voice for a real and qualitative change in the lives of children, irrespective of their cast, creed, religion and gender. It is only in that way that, together, we can make certain that this becomes a world fit for children together.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Wang Shuxian, Executive Deputy Director of the National Working Committee on Children and Women of China.

Ms. Wang Shuxian (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to express our sympathy, concern and condolences to the victims of the bombings in Algeria.

Today, representatives of various countries are gathered here to review the progress over the past five years in fulfilling the goals set out in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A world fit for children", identify the remaining challenges in achieving those goals, and develop a strategic plan for further progress, which is of great importance. On behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of China, I extend our warmest congratulations to this Meeting and thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the follow-up to the special session on children.

Five years ago, heads of State and Government and representatives of States participating in the special session stressed their commitment to fulfilling the goals set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action to enable every child in the world to have equal opportunities for survival, development, protection and participation. Over the past five years, the Government of China has adhered to the principles of putting children first and acting in the best interests of child, strictly abided by the aims and spirit of the special session on children and the United Nations Millennium Summit, earnestly honoured its commitments, and taken concrete actions to implement the national programme of action for child development in China (2001-2010), which has effectively promoted the progress of the children's cause in China.

In promoting children's development, the Government of China has taken a series of positive measures. First, it has formulated and perfected laws, regulations and policies to protect children's legal rights and interests. A complete set of basic laws for protecting children's rights and interests have been put in place in China. Since 2002, China has revised the Constitution, the Law on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases, the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, the Law on Compulsory Education, and the Law on the Protection of Minors. It has formulated policies and regulations on providing basic education to children, home care to orphans, assistance to street children and children living with HIV/AIDS or orphaned by AIDS, and so on. In 2006, China revised the Law on the Protection of Minors in order to reinforce the protection of children.

Secondly, we have strengthened the Government's responsibility in addressing children's needs in order to implement the national programme of action. In line with the global goal of children's development, the Government of China has formulated and implemented a national programme of action for child development in China from 2001 to 2010. Local Governments at the provincial, prefectural/municipal and county/city levels have also formulated plans for children's development. In 2006, for the first time, the central Government and local Governments at various levels incorporated children's development into their overall plans for economic and social development so as to promote the achievement of coordinated development. Governments at all levels have established and improved cross-sectoral cooperation mechanisms for children's development. The national Government has continuously increased its financial allocation to compulsory education in the poor and ethnic-minority regions, assistance to students from poor families, health care for women and infants, and the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. About 150 million rural students enjoy free compulsory education, and some receive free textbooks and living subsidies. Projects to encourage hospitalized delivery, reduce the maternal mortality rate and eliminate neonatal tetanus have been introduced in the poor areas. For AIDS patients, anti-retroviral medicines are provided free of charge, testing is conducted anonymously, and approaches to preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV have been adopted.

Thirdly, we conduct regular monitoring and evaluation, and are improving our sex-disaggregated statistics. In response to the programme for children's development from 2001 to 2010, the central and local

Governments have developed a sex-disaggregated monitoring and statistical index system and established a monitoring index database for children's development. In 2006, the Government conducted a midterm evaluation of the implementation of the nation plan of action, which has provided the basis for a follow-up strategy for children's development.

By implementing a series of laws, regulations, policies and measures over the past five years, China has registered further progress and achievements in many aspects of children's development, such as health care, education, the protection of their rights and interests, and gender equality. Children's health and nutritional situation continue to improve, and enrolment and participation in basic education continue to increase. The goals of reducing the mortality rates of infants and children under the age of five and of achieving universal basic education, among others, are all on track or ahead of schedule, and the maternal mortality rate has dropped markedly.

New progress has been made in children's protection. Orphaned, disabled and street children, and children from migrant families, ethnic minorities and poor families are being covered by the protection and assistance. The environment for children's development has been optimized. Children's participation in matters affecting them has been largely assured. We are pleased that a child from China has been selected to attend this Meeting.

We realize that, as a developing country with 341 million children under the age of 18, China still faces many challenges in child development, such as regional disparities and new or emerging issues caused by population migration, the rising rates of birth defects and the gender gap, and the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. To address those problems, the Government of China will take further action to implement a people-centred, scientific outlook on development, speed up social development focused on improving livelihoods, create an economic and social environment more suitable to the development of children's well-being, continue to enhance the implementation of the national plan of action, strengthen the social security of vulnerable children, and narrow the gap in order to promote coordinated development.

The Government of China would like to reiterate its commitment to sparing no effort to continue to promote children's development. We hope to reach a consensus with all countries at this meeting so as to intensify our ongoing efforts and contributions to build a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Carmen Oliveira, Deputy Minister for the Promotion of the Rights of Children and Adolescents of Brazil.

Ms. Oliveira (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to extend my warmest greetings on behalf of the Government of Brazil and of the more than 1,200 Brazilian representatives who participated in the seventh National Conference on the Rights of Childhood and Youth, held in Brasilia last week. The local preparatory conferences organized in 4,500 cities enjoyed the participation of 300,000 people. The Conference's central theme — "Ensuring the human rights of boys, girls and adolescents: a necessary investment" — was closely related to that of this Commemorative Meeting.

At the opening of the Conference, President Lula reaffirmed his commitment to establishing conditions conducive to Brazil's attaining the Millennium Development Goals. He stressed the objective of changing an economic development model that generates the concentration of wealth and social exclusion, which have historically placed our country among the 10 largest economies in the world, but also among the five countries with the worst distribution of income. Emphasizing the unconditional priority of his Government to fighting poverty, President Lula recognized that the highest interest of boys, girls and adolescents is based on the assurance of social justice and non-discrimination, especially in a country where 43 per cent of boys and girls in early childhood live in poor families.

The implementation of policies since 2003 allowed Brazil in 2006 to attain the lowest indicators of extreme poverty in the past two decades and the best income distribution in the past 25 years. In that period, Brazil experienced the inclusion of more than 11 million families in income-transfer programmes. Moreover, the number of jobs doubled and the minimum wage increased to 26 per cent above the rate of inflation.

The issue of ethnic and racial inequality has also been a priority, as reflected in progress in the legal settlement of more than 10 million hectares for indigenous populations and people of African descent. Seeking to decrease regional inequalities, the Federal Government, with the support of UNICEF and local Governments, has implemented programmes in the northern and north-eastern regions, where we find the highest concentration of boys, girls and adolescents and the lowest indicators of human and childhood development.

Improvements in the health sector are also promising. In comparison with the previous period, malnutrition rates have been cut by half and child mortality rates have fallen by almost 25 per cent. In addition, a basic health programme has been implemented in 90 per cent of Brazilian cities.

More recently, there has been significant progress in the educational sector, with a tenfold increase in the current budget for basic education, support for full-time schooling, and an expansion in the number of technical schools and in the offer of university allowances for poor students. Five new programmes for the protection of boys, girls and adolescents from violence have been elaborated, including a national policy against sexual violence and the creation of a national system of assistance to adolescents in conflict with the law.

Those programmes have already shown very positive results, such as the reduction by half, in the last decade, of exploitative child labour; the establishment of plans to combat sexual violence in the most vulnerable cities; a decrease in the murder rate of young people, reflecting the adoption of the Disarmament Statute, which has saved thousands of lives.

All the initiatives I have discussed are part of an unprecedented programme, entitled "Plan President — Friend of Children and Adolescents". The programme was elaborated according to the goals of "A world fit for children" and includes 242 measures. The elaboration of annual reports allows for monitoring, with the involvement of some 40 institutions.

Brazil is committed to cooperating with its neighbouring countries in the region within the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), in particular through the Niñosur initiative, which encompasses 10 countries and has four priorities: combating sexual exploitation, juvenile justice, child labour and early childhood.

On the global level, Brazil will host in 2008 the third World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in cooperation with national Governments, UNICEF, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes and other non-governmental organizations.

Two new programmes will further contribute to improving our social indicators. The Growth Acceleration Programme will enable the development of the economy in a more equitable and sustainable manner. Furthermore, the Programme for the Acceleration of Citizenship, together with the Social Programme for Children and Adolescents, will strengthen efforts for social inclusion.

Last but not least, I would like to emphasize the importance we attach to the contributions of children and adolescents, as shown by the fact that adolescents represented 25 per cent of delegates to the last National Conference in Brasilia, with the right to vote and in the same capacity as adults.

In a context in which young people are often criticized for being mere consumers and for their political apathy, we reaffirm now more than ever the need to ensure their right to participate actively in the decision-making process. The recent Brazilian experience has allowed for a rich intergenerational exchange between adults and adolescents, reinvigorating us all. As the Brazilian poet Guimarães Rosa said: "Life is a communal meal, to which each person contributes their seasoning, to better flavour it".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Poldej Pintrateep, Deputy Minister of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand.

Mr. Pintrateep (Thailand): First of all, on behalf of the Thai Government, I would like to extend our condolences to the Government of Algeria and the families of the United Nations staff affected by the terrorist attack.

It is a privilege and an honour for me to have this opportunity to address such a remarkable commemorative high-level plenary meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. On behalf of the Thai delegation, Government and people, I would like to express my appreciation to the United Nations for taking a leading role on children's issues.

Since acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, the Thai Government has placed a high priority on the implementation of every aspect of the articles of the Convention and on the Convention's optional protocols, to which Thailand acceded in 2006.

I would like to reaffirm Thailand's commitment to all conventions and international instruments that it had signed or acceded to. Regarding the outcome document of the special session on children, "A world fit for children", in 2002, the Cabinet assigned the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to be responsible for coordinating and crafting the national policy and strategic plans on children's issues. Under the framework of "A world fit for children", for the period from 2007 to 2016, 10,000 children have participated in that policy formulation process, in which their views are included alongside those of representatives from governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The national policy and strategic plan for children's development of Thailand consists of 11 aspects, including four aspects from "A world fit for children". These are in the areas of family and children; child physical and mental health promotion; promotion of child safety and prevention of injury in children; children affected by HIV/AIDS; education for children; children's recreation; children and mass media; culture and religion; the promotion of child participation; the protection of children in need of special protection; and revisions of laws, rules and regulations relating to children.

At the national level, there are 35 organizations implementing 308 programmes and activities. At the provincial level, organizations in 76 provinces have adopted provincial action plans. My Government specifically announced a National Agenda for Children and Youth in January 2007 to support the national plan of action, which emphasizes five areas: creative media appropriate to children, youth and families; creative activities for children and youth; quality day care centres, child development centres and kindergartens; child-friendly provinces; and establishing a specific family law to help protect the family.

To encourage child and youth participation, child and youth councils have been established in 76 provinces and at the national level. In September 2007, the National Assembly approved the Protection of Victims of Violence in the Family Act, which protects everyone in the family, especially children and women. The following month, it approved the Promotion of Child and Youth Development Act, which contributes directly to the promotion of programmes and activities for children and youth at all levels. Last week, the National Assembly approved the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, which includes the protection of legal and illegal migrant children and women, and imposes heavier penalties on the perpetrators.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Thailand is committed to the well-being of children and their families. In that respect, we are making our country fit for children. We believe that could be best achieved through a bottom-up approach of encouraging and making each family and each community fit for children and accordingly reaching up, from the local level to the provincial, regional and national levels. Cooperation at the regional and international level is equally important in order for countries to share experiences and good practices. I trust that this Meeting will allow us to further learn from one another and work together towards the common goal of a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gonzalo Arenas, Deputy of Minister of Planning of Chile.

Mr. Arenas (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express the solidarity of the Government of Chile with the people and the Government of Algeria regarding the cowardly attacks that took place this morning.

"We can say that never before has Chile made such an important and comprehensive effort for children and their mothers". With those words, spoken with pride by President Michelle Bachelet Jeria a few days ago during a gathering with children at La Moneda Palace, I wish to begin my report on the achievements of my country regarding the protection of children and adolescents, who now represent 31 per cent of the approximately 16 million inhabitants of Chile. The achievements in the current situation of children's rights in Chile are reflected in the following areas.

With regard to poverty, over the past 17 years, the country has reduced total and infant poverty by 50 per cent. Indeed, while in 1990, 50.7 per cent of all children under age 18 lived in poverty, by 2006 that figure had dropped to 21 per cent.

In the area of health, Chile reduced its infant mortality rate from 8.9 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 7.9 in 2005. Furthermore, a public health reform system has been implemented in stages and is expected to reduce infant mortality and morbidity rates even further.

In the field of education, my country has increased preschool coverage significantly over the past two years of President Bachelet's Government. Our goal is to add 70,000 new available places in day-care services, which would represent an increase of 582 per cent, and 43,000 new slots for the 2 to 4 age group, which would represent a 140 per cent increase, between 2006 and 2010.

We have also promised universal preschool education, which will enable all children to enter school at the age of 4, through the enactment of a constitutional reform, which also increased from 12 to 14 the age until which all Chilean children are guaranteed an education.

In the area of legislative reforms, a series of laws has been enacted in Chile aimed at improving the lives of children and adolescents and guaranteeing the protection of their rights. The following measures are particularly noteworthy: the law aimed at curbing domestic violence; the creation of family tribunals; automatic family allowances throughout pregnancy and until the child is 18 years old; the right to maternity and post-natal leave and an allowance for adoptive mothers and fathers, irrespective of the age of the child adopted.

Beyond those achievements, Chile is facing great challenges, and addressing them is our Government's priority.

There is a marked degree of inequality in Chile, stemming from three factors: socio-economic bracket, geographic location and membership in a given social or ethnic group. Despite certain positive indicators, narrowing the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is a task that the State of Chile has firmly undertaken, as the inequality in income distribution affects primarily children and adolescents.

In the educational arena, there is disparity in the learning rates of children from different sectors and in access to secondary education.

In compliance with the presidential mandate that gives priority to social protection, a child protection system called "Chile Grows with You" has been established in our country aimed at children and their families, from pregnancy to 4 years of age. "Chile Grows with You" gives children access to universal services and assistance, catering for their needs and enhancing their development. In addition, priority is given to families, and basic conditions are established in the emotional and physical environment in which children grow up so as to promote their comprehensive and harmonious development as they get older. With this system, it is hoped that equal opportunities will be given to all from the earliest age, irrespective of social origin, gender, ethnicity or family configuration, so that every child can develop to the fullest of his or her natural capacity.

The system offers the following benefits, among others: a support programme for bio-psychosocial development in the public health system, from pregnancy until entry into preschool; differentiated support and guarantees for children from the 40 per cent of households with the lowest incomes or who are vulnerable, including a single family subsidy, which is offered throughout pregnancy and which can be maintained until age 18; and free high-quality childcare centres and nursery schools for all children of working mothers, or those seeking work, studying or with special needs. That system is being implemented gradually in our 345 municipalities and will be fully implemented by January 2008.

Furthermore, knowing that family plays an important role in the development of children, we have recently launched a massive information programme with a view to strengthening familial relationships and ties from the beginning of life.

In the area of special protection, Chile promotes and strengthens a national system to protect the rights of children and adolescents who are seriously harmed and to hold those who violate the law accountable, through a joint comprehensive care programme with local governments and private organizations. A total of 961 programmes are being implemented in the areas of preventive assistance, care, protection, redress and the rehabilitation of children and adolescents whose rights have been violated.

With regard to universal protection, care is provided to 36,000 children in low-complexity situations. For infants and children in situations of medium complexity, 296 regional programmes are offered, which care for 25,825 children and adolescents. For high-complexity cases, there are 560 specialized programmes, which care for 29,967 children and adolescents. The country thus has specific programmes and projects aimed at putting an end to violations of the rights of children and adolescents.

Chile has also made substantial progress in the promotion and strengthening of the technical capacity of the institutions and teams providing assistance to children in individual and family situations of a greater complexity, including the victims of sexual and commercial exploitation and trafficking. More generally speaking, they also look after the victims of child labour, a practice considered dangerous and unacceptable, in accordance with the commitments undertaken in the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action.

In that context, we have created innovative educational programmes such as re-schooling projects for children and adolescents with highly complex psychosocial profiles. That is why State bodies, together with civil society — some of whose representatives are with us in this Hall — are actively participating in the development of specific intersectoral initiatives promoting the sustainability of the actions undertaken and progress towards a comprehensive social policy. Chile has also undertaken ongoing coordination efforts with international bodies such as UNICEF, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration. Furthermore, the country has strengthened its programmes aimed at protecting the rights of abandoned children likely to be adopted, guaranteeing their right to have an identity and to live within a family by defining appropriate legal, technical and administrative procedures.

As a country, we have made progress in protecting the rights of children and adolescents, thus fulfilling the commitments set out in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2). Moreover, we have boldly implemented a children's social protection system that, in effect, recognizes that inequalities begin at birth and that addressing them in a timely manner is key to our country's development.

Certainly, there are many unresolved issues that the Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children" requires us to address — for example, the challenge of appropriately addressing the emergence of new problems related to the quality and conditions of children's lives that have a negative impact on their social coexistence. Those problems make it difficult to implement the mechanisms designed to strengthen social cohesion within our country, but we shall not relent in our efforts to achieve such cohesion.

Chile welcomes the report submitted by the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children, as well as the Third Committee's recent decision to appoint a Special Representative on Violence against Children.

Finally, as Her Excellency President Michelle Bachelet stated to the General Assembly, "We do not need new commitments; we simply need to fulfil the commitments already made" (*A/62/PV.4, p. 34*). We are concerned that Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 cannot be achieved. That is why we welcome the launching, on 26 September 2007 in this city, of two important initiatives: the Global Business Plan for Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 and the campaign Deliver Now for Women and Children, which is coordinated by the World Health Organization and is focused on the achievement of those Goals.

Convinced that the future of children is now, Chile wishes to reaffirm its firm commitment to contributing actively to the promotion and protection of the rights of all children. We shall resolutely take part in all initiatives aimed at ensuring compliance with the international commitments in this area.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ilkka Oksala, State Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland.

Mr. Oksala (Finland): The children and young people of the present are the adults of tomorrow, and their living conditions and resources will be crucially defined by our decision-making today. Thus, our children will receive the resources for life with which we adults are ready to provide them. We adults must also bear that responsibility for all children of the world.

The young representatives who are part of the delegation of Finland want to bring to the attention of the General Assembly the concerns that have arisen when they have discussed the well-being of children and young people and changes in society. Our young people are concerned about the unequal distribution of welfare. It appears that the welfare of people is being increasingly polarized in our world, which, at the same time, is growing richer and richer. Our young people hope that the negative effects of that polarization can be prevented.

It is easy to share the concerns expressed by our young people. At the global level, Finland has committed itself to eradicating poverty in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals. That objective is an essential element in Finland's development policy, and it is based on respect for human rights, always taking into account children's best interests. From our perspective within Finnish society, it can be stated that the economic development of society has been strong for more than a decade. At the same time, however, there has been a marked trend towards polarization in society with regard to the income of some families. Finland cannot be satisfied with its social development, in which the proportion of children in the lowest income brackets has been increasing, despite favourable economic development.

That favourable economic development has required active participation by everyone in the labour market. In Finland, people are employed outside the home, and both men and women, mothers and fathers, are taking part equally in employment. However, the question arises as to whether the demands of working life have increased too much from the child's point of view. Parents are spending less and less time with their children. There is a similar trend in other countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as well.

One could even say that children have to compete with work in order to exercise their right to spend time with their parents. That situation cannot be regarded as being in children's best interests. A family's economic well-being does not always guarantee the actual well-being of its children. That is a problem that affects all of us, and we should all work together to try to find various ways to solve it.

Finland has prepared its own national plan of action, "A Finland fit for children". As part of the plan's implementation, a new independent institution, the ombudsman for children, has been established. We would like to join with Sweden in encouraging other countries to consider establishing similar institutions.

As an innovation included in the plan of action, Finland is actively developing methods to evaluate in advance the effects of various social decisions on the lives of children and young people. We in Finland also want to see children and childhood as an investment in our future society.

Finland continues to develop specific models for the assessment of the impact of decisions on children and hopes that other countries will also be involved in this development work. In many countries of the world, economic development has been favourable in recent years. This is a positive trend. But development should not take place on adults' terms only. Increasing economic welfare should also be used nationally for improving the situation of children. We feel that more and more countries can now afford to really focus on this matter.

In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child is entitled to protection by society to the maximum extent of its available resources and to participate in decision-making in society. Development of the methods assessing the child impact of decisions will play a major role in the future. On the basis of the results of such assessments, we will be better able to promote the full implementation of the rights of every child.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hussain Saeed Al Shaikh, Deputy Minister for Social Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al Shaikh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to join fellow participants today at this meeting devoted to reviewing progress in the implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action contained in the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). I would like to extend, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, our deep gratitude and appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for his able stewardship of this important meeting. We wish also to thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his valuable efforts in leading the United Nations towards achieving its desired goals and for his report (A/62/259) on today's subject.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

This gathering, which indicates the international community's resolve to give special priority to children, provides an opportunity to review and evaluate our efforts, recognize difficulties and determine the work that needs to be done before the target year of 2015, which requires collective action to identify the appropriate mechanisms for building a society fit for children.

The Plan of Action for building a world fit for children is based on four main priorities: ensuring and supporting a healthy lifestyle; providing high-quality education; ensuring protection from abuse, exploitation and violence; and fighting HIV. These priorities have been the focus of our attention and have been thoroughly discussed during the events of this special session meeting.

In this context, I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to the Plan and to acting in the best interest of children. I believe that development cannot be achieved without ensuring the fundamental rights of children and providing favourable conditions for their survival, growth and protection.

My country reaffirms its commitment to the pledges taken at the special conferences and summits in the area of development, and on children in particular, and it has signed a number of conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138, concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and ILO Convention No. 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

In this context, a number of national laws have been enacted, including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2006, which encompasses all rights stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Other laws include the Federal Human Trafficking Act, also of 2006, and the Federal Family Act of 2005. The latter constitutes a general framework for the protection of the family, the core of society, and for enabling it to play its leading role in protecting and raising children and in ensuring their welfare. The adoption of an act on children is in progress; this is expected to be an effective instrument in helping the relevant authorities to take the concerns and requirements of children into consideration while developing programmes and plans in their best interest.

As a result of the efforts and programmes being implemented in our country, many indicators associated with children have shown improvement, especially in areas of health, education and protection.

A few days ago, the Government of the United Arab Emirates approved the largest budget in its history, 34.9 billion dirhams, of which 51 per cent was allocated to the social sector, including education, health, labour, social affairs, culture, youth and society development. At least 34 per cent of the social service budget was devoted to the education sector alone, while the 9.2 per cent was allocated to the health sector.

The health sector has achieved higher levels of excellence in the areas of primary and secondary health care, both in preventive and therapeutic aspects, and child health-care levels are now in line with the best international practices. That is why the World Health Organization named Abu Dhabi and Dubai as being among the three healthiest cities in the Middle East region.

As a result of the appropriate and sound health policies implemented in the United Arab Emirates, child and infant mortality indicators have improved, with neonatal and infant mortality rates dropping to 6.87 and 7.7 per 1,000 live births, respectively. The mortality rates of newborn children and children under the age of 5 also declined, to 5.37 and 9.87 per 1,000 live births, respectively.

Our expanded national immunization programme has also made significant progress in covering targeted categories of children, with the percentage of covered children now exceeding 95 per cent. No cases of polio or diphtheria have been recorded since 1990, and no deaths resulting from measles or diarrhoeal diseases were reported. As a result of improved health care for expectant mothers and the high dependency on in-hospital births, which now exceeds 99 per cent, no maternal deaths have been recorded at the perinatal stage during the past 10 years.

With a view to enhancing child health, a mandatory pre-marriage testing programme has been introduced in order to protect children from hereditary diseases. Other programmes such as those for breastfeeding support, the early detection of neonatal diseases, adolescent health and the accident protection for children under the age of 15, were also introduced. In addition, school health-care services are provided, including a project to promote health in schools and the establishment of unified standards for school meals.

As for the fight against AIDS, our Government has, through its national programme for the control and prevention of AIDS, succeeded in controlling AIDS cases and keeping them at the lowest levels in the world since the programme began in 1985. Thus, AIDS poses no risk to the children of my country.

Due to its importance to the development of children's personalities and to their mental growth, education and education policy development occupy a major place in our national development policy. The Government has taken steps to reorganize primary education, amend the educational structure, develop educational curricula and evaluate the learning achievements of students. In 2006, the Government approved the Future Schools Project, an innovative educational system that responds to the requirements of and aspirations for the future and that is aimed at bringing the quality of our schools up to international standards and graduating students capable of successfully completing their university studies. The project has been implemented in 50 schools at the three levels of education. In reviewing the status of child education, indicators have shown that the female to male enrolment ratio has reached 94.8 per cent in the first level of education, 92.9 in the second level, and 106.7 in secondary education.

There is no doubt that children's needs are not confined to good education and health services. I hope I do not appear to be exaggerating when I say that protecting children from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse is the third cornerstone of the child's life, giving meaning to his or her existence and ensuring his or her well-being. The United Arab Emirates has therefore given this subject the attention it deserves and has adopted legislation toughening the penalties for crimes against children. This legislation ensures proper conduct by legal guardians responsible for managing a child's life and protecting his or her money and property. We have also regulated the right of custody and alimony for the child in case of separation by the parents. This legislation also provides for special treatment of children who violate the law. In mid-2007 a national institute for protecting women and children from exploitation, violence and abuse was launched in Dubai, providing protection and shelter for abused women and children until all the reasons necessitating such protection are resolved.

The Government of the United Arab Emirates has endeavoured to support development at the regional and international levels, particularly in countries with the fewest resources, through the provision of financial and in-kind assistance. More than 95 countries have benefited from such assistance, which has exceeded $70 billion, mostly in the form of grants.

In view of the direct and indirect impact of education in general, in particular childhood education, on development efforts in developing countries, which represent a major challenge for those countries, the new Dubai Giving Campaign has been launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and ruler of Dubai. It is aimed at supporting the educational systems of a number of poor countries with a view to bringing hope for the future to children there, thus breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and enabling those children to contribute to the development of their communities and their countries. The campaign reflects the social cohesion and harmony of the United Arab Emirates, irrespective of ethnic and cultural background, and reflects the ability of this international social fabric to participate in making a positive change in the world and in helping its people and communities to achieve the development, progress and overall prosperity they desire. The total amount of donations to the campaign was 1,738,334,807 United Arab Emirates dirhams. A similar grant was given by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, and the campaign thus reached about 3 billion dirhams, equivalent to $1 billion, for the children of the world.

Let us remember: we still have a lot of work to do before we can say that we live in a world fit for children. A great deal needs to be done to save children who die from preventable diseases, who live in hunger or who are denied their fundamental rights to life, health, security and education. There are children who suffer from foreign occupation, violence and armed conflict, or who are forced to enter into early marriage or work in dangerous conditions. Millions of children have been orphaned and made vulnerable because of HIV/AIDS; many of them will never know the meaning of childhood.

Let us work together — Governments, community-based organizations, the business sector and all others interested in children's welfare — to implement the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" — a world that protects children, interacts with their concerns, understands their needs and realizes their aspirations. Let us build a better life for children, where they are treated as an invaluable and inexhaustible resource for the future. We look forward to this future with a new vision and a firm will — a future where we can achieve the childhood we want and where we can find a world fit for children. May God grant us success in that endeavour.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Rita Skjaervik, State Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of Norway, and to Ms. Camilla van Passchen, youth delegate of Norway.

Ms. Skjaervik (Norway): The special session on children in 2002 was crucial in drawing up a road map for strengthening children's rights all over the world. Today, at this important crossroad, five years later, we have the instruments. Now it is time to act. We must ensure that this Meeting will not be just another venue for repeating what we have said before, but that it will actually take the agenda of "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) forward. Failing to invest in children means failing in achieving development. While we are halfway to 2015, we are much less than halfway to achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a common basis for our efforts. It requires a rights-based approach. Further efforts are needed to integrate children's issues visibly and systematically into general programmes, policies and budgets, as well as into cross-cutting themes. Governments should incorporate the Convention into national legislation on child protection, as Norway has done.

As a direct result of "A world fit for children", Norway established a national plan of action to follow up selected goals relevant for children and young people in Norway, and real progress has been made. This was followed by the Government's Development Strategy for Children and Young People in the South. It builds on a rights-based approach and addresses emerging protection challenges.

Norway recognizes the vital importance of education, not only as a right in itself, but also as a means to improve health, protection, participation and gender equality. Education also promotes the child's possibility of realizing his or her full potential. In 2008, Norway will host a high-level international conference on education for all and will focus on measures to include the many children who are without access to quality education.

In the area of health, Norway, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, is helping to generate renewed international momentum and to mobilize an effective international response through the Global Campaign for the Health MDGs. The aim is to be more effective and better coordinated, to invest more and to ensure that we reach the poorest and the weakest.

My Government has intensified the struggle to end all kinds of violence against children. The Government has recently established a new holistic treatment centre, the so-called Children's House, which will carry out legal investigation, treatment and therapy under the same roof. At the international level, Norway actively supported the groundbreaking United Nations study on violence (see A/61/299). We welcome the Third Committee's endorsement of the proposal for the establishment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General who would coordinate efforts in close cooperation with UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization and others. Furthermore, the 10-year strategic review (A/62/228) of the Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children provides a special opportunity to deal more effectively with the impact of new conflict patterns on children and adolescents. For Norway, these issues are an integral part of our overall efforts in the area of promoting peace and peacebuilding.

Child participation is probably the least implemented of children's rights worldwide. It deserves special attention by all actors promoting child rights. In Norway, the Ombudsperson for Children has been a key advocate for child participation and child-friendly protection and response mechanisms. We welcome the valuable input from the second international meeting of independent human rights institutions for children, which was convened yesterday, 10 December.

In Norway, there is currently an increasing focus on child participation. This year the first parliamentary hearing for children took place, and several ministers, including the Prime Minister, had to respond to suggestions from a group of adolescents.

I will now hand over to Camilla van Paaschen, member of the Children's Forum, youth representative in our delegation and member of the Youth Council of the Ombudsperson for Children in Norway.

Ms. Van Paschen (Norway): I was born in the same year as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I belong to the first generation that has grown up with the Convention. Over the past two days I have had the pleasure of sharing experiences with young people from all around the world. The challenges in our lives differ a lot. Nevertheless, we share the need to be protected against violence, and we share the need to be heard in matters that concern us.

Ladies and gentlemen — adults: children are the only true experts on what it is like to be a child. I call on you always to consult us before you make decisions that affect us. Remember that the times are changing. We are young in another way than you were. We live in a different world than you did. For that reason, you should never assume that the challenges today are the same as the ones you faced when you were children.

We have the competence that you need. Our participation will benefit society, not only today, but also in our common future. I hope that our contributions over the past few days will lead to an actual and genuine culture for always consulting children in matters that concern us. We, the young people of the world, insist on being both seen and heard, not only observed. You need our experience, our passion and our honesty.

Finally, I would like to say that in the Children's Forum we have asked many questions. We did not get so many answers today, and we hope that tomorrow will be better.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Huynh Thi Nhan, Standing Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labour and Invalids of Viet Nam.

Ms. Huynh Thi Nhan (Viet Nam): First of all, on behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to express our warmest greetings to the President of the General Assembly. We wish him every success in his noble task of contributing to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the Declaration contained in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), in the best interests of all the world's children.

Despite various difficulties and challenges in recent years, Viet Nam is making remarkable social and economic gains, largely as a result of sound socio-economic development planning and continued political and security stability. Viet Nam's economy continues to grow rapidly, at an average of 7.5 per cent per year.

In addition to economic development, Viet Nam has placed priority on social development. Over the past five years, the Government of Viet Nam has continued to show its strong commitment and determination by implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and "A world fit for children". The State has revised and amended many important laws — including the criminal law, the law on the protection, care and education of children, the law on gender equality and the law on HIV/AIDS prevention — and has introduced many strategies, programmes and projects in order to better protect the rights and interests of children.

Furthermore, we have developed and launched our second national action plan for children. Child-related goals and targets have been incorporated into socio-economic development plans from the central to the local level. Viet Nam has been working diligently to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to implement its own 12 development goals and 32 concrete targets based on the MDGs, including child-related goals.

In actively responding to the commitment to building a world fit for children, Viet Nam has been creating child-friendly environments in schools, the family and society. The campaign "Building communes and wards fit for children" has combined the resources of both the State and society with systematic inter-agency supervision at all levels. At present, 100 per cent of Viet Nam's provinces and cities are implementing that model, and we are doing our utmost to ensure that 70 per cent of all communes and wards are fit for children by 2010.

Thanks to those efforts, Vietnamese children have enjoyed favourable living conditions in a safe and healthy environment. Approximately 96 per cent of children under 6 are entitled to free medical examinations and treatment at public health care facilities. Ninety per cent of children have been inoculated with six different vaccines. Under-five mortality rates have decreased. Children's enrolment in primary and secondary school has increased. Models of community-based child protection have been implemented nationwide. Favourable conditions have been created for Vietnamese children to express their ideas concerning their lives.

However, Viet Nam continues to be confronted with many difficulties and challenges in the area of child protection and care. Our child malnutrition and birth rates are still high, child trafficking and juvenile delinquency have not yet declined, and drug abuse and HIV/AIDS infection among children are still of concern. Children in remote or mountainous areas continue to live in difficult conditions. Health care and other services for children are still limited. The database on children continues to be lacking. The social worker network does not meet the appropriate requirements, and many social workers lack experience.

Viet Nam has been doing its utmost to implement the MDGs, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and legislation related to "A world fit for children". In the course of that implementation, Viet Nam has profoundly understood that it must bring its internal strength fully into play and continuously improve the apparatus of the State; socialize the work of protecting, caring for and educating children; attach great importance to international cooperation, particularly experience-sharing; and strengthen multilateral and bilateral cooperation in order to achieve those goals, in the best interests of the children of Viet Nam as well as those of the rest of the world.

On behalf of the Government of Viet Nam, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, especially UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, for their active cooperation with and effective assistance to Viet Nam in the implementation of goals and targets on behalf of our children. Once again, I wish every success to this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting on children.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Yadira Hidalgo, Deputy Minister for Social Protection of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and to Ms. Karla Cruz and Mr. Orlando Hidalgo, youth delegates of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Hidalgo (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in accordance with the provisions of article 78 of our constitution, which states that children and adolescents are full legal persons, and mindful of gender equality, would like to introduce a girl and a boy, Carla and Orlando, who will represent us before the Assembly and present a report by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Cruz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela enthusiastically welcomes the organization of this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting and is especially pleased to see the participation of children and adolescents from around the world present here. We are the true protagonists of this meeting. We would also like to welcome and thank the other United Nations officials and the representatives of the various delegations present.

I would like to begin by saying that our country has 26.6 million inhabitants, of whom 11 million are children and adolescents. All the activities to guarantee their rights are enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Organic Law for the Protection of the Child and the Adolescent. Between 2002 and 2007, policies were formulated to guarantee the social rights of children, such as health and education, in a universal and equitable fashion, as well as to strengthen their social participation and civic rights.

Likewise, the State of Venezuela has ratified most of the international instruments concerning childhood. It has also enacted a set of laws designed to provide comprehension protection of childhood, including the law for the protection of children and adolescents with respect to the use of the Internet, video games and other multimedia applications; the organic law to combat organized crime; the special law against computer crime; the official standard of the national programme of HIV/AIDS; the law of the social responsibility of radio and television; the organic law on the rights of women to a violence-free life; the organic law for persons with disabilities; the law for the promotion and protection of breastfeeding; the organic law for the protection of the family and responsible fatherhood and motherhood; the draft law for the protection of people with HIV/AIDS from discrimination; and the draft law for a birth registry, among others.

Concerning the successes of the National Action Plan of "A world fit for children", we can point to the following. In the promotion of a healthy life, overall malnutrition in children under 5 years of age is at a low level of 4.64 per cent, and chronic malnutrition is in a moderate range. This indicates that the country is less than one percentage point away from complying with the established goal and, if the current trend continues, the goal can be reached before 2015.

These achievements are due to the high coverage of meal programmes and nutritional protection programmes, such as soup kitchens, which help 600,000 people, most of whom are children and adolescents. School cafeterias provide meals for children aged 7 to 14. School meals programmes cover 1.4 million pupils and homes which provide comprehensive care for 350,000 children up to age 6.

On the subject of access to sanitation services and drinking water, coverage on a household basis in the urban populations is 92 per cent and at 66 per cent for the rural population. The country has 150 treatment and chlorination plants that guarantee drinking water for 30 million people.

National health policies and programmes have been established for the overall development of children and adolescents. The Barrio Adentro Mission covers roughly 70 per cent of the population in primary care, with 8,533 public clinics where family visits are made and preventive medicine practised. More than 200,000 vaccinations were provided and all types of free medication were supplied, covering 95 per cent of all health problems. Seven public clinics were built, along with 83 comprehensive diagnostic centres, 57 comprehensive rehabilitation centres, four high-technology centres and 1,415 dental clinics.

The first child cardiology hospital was built, which has treated more than 4,000 children and adolescents from Venezuela, Latin America and the Caribbean. The hospital has offered consultation and examination to 80,000 patients each year.

The national vaccination programme has reached more than 90 per cent, with mandatory vaccinations schemes for children. At present, all the population aged 18 to 39 years is being immunized in order to eradicate rubella in the country. The cold chain system was strengthened at the national level and 1,721 permanent vaccination centres were set up in the Barrio Adentro Mission clinics.

Venezuela has a moderate prevalence of tuberculosis whose rate hovers between 25 and 50 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. The goals for HIV/AIDS is to halt and prevent its propagation as well as to expand knowledge. The incidence and prevalence is lower than 0.33 per cent, or between 70,000 and 100,000 cases per year. Currently, there is a prevention campaign underway through town councils, with the assistance of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

In terms of access to quality education, in initial education, coverage up to 6 years of age has increased by 3 per cent, thanks to the Simoncito project. Primary education enrolment, for children between 7 and 14 years of age also increased from 4.8 to 4.9 million with an increase of 20 per cent in the tertiary stage due to the expansion of Bolivarian schools, which reduced the number of school drop-outs and increased enrolment by 1.3 million.

The Ribas Mission trained 800,000 new graduates and the Sucre Mission enrolled 350,000 high school graduates. We have also strengthened 239 technical schools, with an enrolment of 189,000 students, and the National Centre for the Teaching of Science has held more than 800 student meetings on the integration of education and work.

Mr. Hidalgo (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The national Government has increased investment in education through the following strategies: the elimination of fees for public school enrolment; the strengthening of the programme for school meals; the creation of new Bolivarian schools and secondary schools; the implementation of "Morality and Light" programmes; and the guaranteeing of gender equality enshrined in the Constitution and in the educational curriculum. Thanks to the Robinson Mission, which managed to provide literacy training to 1.5 million people, our country is now an illiteracy-free country.

Venezuela guarantees the right to identity at birth through the immediate registration of newborns in hospital registry units, thus guaranteeing them the right to inclusion and to receive the benefits of social, economic and political development.

Venezuela has protected children and adolescents who participate in armed conflict, and this protection has been recognized and enshrined in our Constitution since 1999. In its articles, the Constitution incorporates the proposal found in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the optional protocol of the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the participation of children in armed conflicts.

Venezuela fights against child labour in many ways. The State applies measures to achieve the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, such as its plan to prevent and eradicate child labour.

Concerning the elimination of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, Venezuela has ratified the international instruments dealing with this topic and is currently developing a national plan against the trafficking of persons and will apply this national plan to commercial sexual exploitation and child pornography as well. Moreover, we are also implementing a national action plan designed for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents against violence and exploitation.

We are also implementing programmes to support and strengthen the family. These include guidelines to structure and operate the substitute family programme with the family placement approach, instructions for implementing the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, and general guidelines for national adoptions, for the authorization for children and adolescents to travel inside and outside the country and for the protection of children and adolescents before, during and after natural disasters.

Other programmes in support of the family include guidelines to guarantee the right to sport, rest, leisure, play and recreation; and to guarantee the requirement of human rights in the application of protective measures in matters affecting children and adolescents. Also, a bi-national action plan for the comprehensive protection of border children and families is proposed.

In Venezuela we have also established a national commission for the participation of children and adolescents; child parliaments; a children's constituent assembly; children's councils; a network for children and Bolivarian students; the promotion of student organizations in educational centres, beginning at the seventh grade; a national day for the system of overall protection; community councils inspired by local constituents; national meetings of the network of indigenous children and adolescents; youth municipal governments; the first national forum for the protection of human rights and the first meeting of the educational system and the national protection system.

Venezuela is disseminating materials in its schools on the values of peace and tolerance in order to promote and foster coexistence. At the national level we are promoting alternative radio programmes and stations for children and adolescents. Venezuela is promoting youth participation in the decisions of child councils as an expression of community government, with the right to be heard, to vote and to be elected as spokespersons for the various labour committees beginning at the age of 15.

Finally, the President of the Republic, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías has launched the Music Mission with the participation of more than 300,000 children and adolescents within a system of child and youth orchestras. For the year 2008 we hope to increase that number to 1 million child and adolescent musicians. In fact, the Venezuelan delegation is pleased to be present at this meeting and to share its experience with you, but let us go further and on behalf of the children and adolescents of Venezuela, we offer a gesture of solidarity for the people and the children and adolescents of Algeria.

We want a world fit for children and adolescents, and we are here to demand it.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Richard Ralainirina, Deputy Minister of Health, Family Planning and Social Welfare of Madagascar.

Mr. Ralainirina (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Republic of Madagascar I have the honour of addressing the Assembly and conveying the warmest congratulations at this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children of December 2007. I would like to share with the Assembly, on behalf of the delegation of Madagascar, the progress we have achieved since the special session of the General Assembly on children, held in May 2002 in New York, and especially the challenges we still face to implement the commitments made during the twenty-seventh special session and set forth in the document entitled "A world fit for children".

The Madagascar Action Plan, represents our road map for the next five years and defines the commitments and the challenges to be taken up in various sectors, whereby the Government intends to carry out a quantitative and qualitative step forward, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus, under the leadership of our President, who has been accelerating the adoption of a results-based approach, we are to optimize effective strategies that will develop innovative steps through decentralization, with community participation and development partnership. Madagascar has made substantial progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In particular, we have seen significant progress in sectors affecting health, education, protection of rights and HIV/AIDS. In terms of health, over the 10 past years, Madagascar has reduced child mortality by more than 30 per cent and we will continue to implement a minimum series of health measures to achieve maximum impact towards the survival of children, especially through designated healthcare weeks for mothers and children that were strongly and fully supported by all of our partners, in particular UNICEF. Furthermore, we recognize our duty to enhance our achievements in terms of nutrition, access to drinking water and a healthy environment in order to advance towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 7. These achievements must be consolidated.

We have seen good results in family planning, but efforts towards increasing awareness must still be pursued in order to improve the overall situation and the status of women who are pregnant and to reduce undesired pregnancies among young women. We should also ensure access to contraception for all women, including in remote areas. Such project would enable us to rapidly reduce the maternal mortality rate.

In the area of education, Madagascar's Action Plan defines a number of ambitious short- and medium-term objectives. Free education with the distribution of school kits has resulted in a clear increase in the enrolment rate at the primary level, on the basis of gender equality. The positive results of education reform still require harmonization with human resource development strategies and rural infrastructure. In the area of decentralization, the accountability of local administrative authorities through shared leadership should enable us to achieve the objectives of our Action Plan. The continuation of all of these endeavours is an essential element of our policy.

Encouraged at the highest State level, we have set up a commission on reforming the rights of the child, which has enabled us to speed up the establishment of a legal framework and to ensure protection for children. This framework includes laws on adoption, the rights and protection of the child, the minimum age for marriage, trafficking of human beings and a recently adopted law on sexual tourism. Following the recommendations of the study of the Secretary-General on violence against children, a national plan of action has been elaborated and validated. Networks for protecting the rights of the child have been set up at certain sites and the Government intends to expand them.

On the subject of HIV/AIDS, above and beyond the figures indicating its prevalence, the attitude towards the disease by the population is still a challenge. We have adopted a law to protect the rights of persons living with HIV.

The President and his wife themselves have supported heightened awareness for voluntary screening, and we are conducting a comprehensive prevention programme. The prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases is still too high and high-risk behaviours too widespread. We should improve universal access to quality care for AIDS patients and maximize our preventive interventions among vulnerable groups.

In recent years, Madagascar has undertaken reforms to ensure a genuine protective environment for children. We are confident in our pursuit of measures to undertake in the higher interests of children. Attaining a world fit for children is a continuing duty for us all. This presupposes a determined and synergetic commitment on the part of Governments, international institutions and civil society.

Madagascar reaffirms its resolute commitment to the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of

Action of the World Summit for Children and to that of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as we strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marko Štrovs, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of Slovenia.

Mr. Štrovs (Slovenia): It is my pleasure and honour again to address the General Assembly on the occasion of this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children.

Slovenia fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Allow me to first express my appreciation and support to the United Nations and UNICEF for organizing this important event. Furthermore, we commend UNICEF for its steady efforts and its invaluable role in building a better world for children. Child protection is one of Slovenia's priorities in its domestic and foreign policies.

Slovenia has committed itself to the full implementation of the outcome of the special session on children, embodied in the document "A world fit for children". For that reason, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a programme entitled "Children and Youth 2006-2016".

In Slovenia, economic efforts play an important part in providing greater employment opportunities and welfare. These efforts give rise to solidarity with the poor and social security for all.

In every region, Governments are using intergovernmental mechanisms, to follow up on the special session, including regional consultations on the United Nations study on violence against children (A/61/299). At the national level, an important mechanism for better implementation of the outcome of the special session is the creation of independent human rights institutions for children.

Slovenia has strongly supported the activities of the United Nations in fighting violence against children in all its aspects and has been involved in the preparation of the United Nations study on violence against children. Slovenia was one of the first countries to act as host to United Nations regional consultations on violence against children. We welcome the draft resolution (A/C.3/62/L.24/Rev.1) calling for, inter alia, the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to act as a high-profile and independent global advocate to promote the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. Furthermore, we expect that, if adopted, such a resolution would consolidate United Nations endeavours in the area of child protection.

On the basis of a broad professional discussion, Slovenia has committed itself to preventing violence in the family and banning corporal punishment of children by preparing a new Act on the Prevention of Violence in the Family. We are implementing the recommendations of the United Nations study presented at the international conference entitled, "Prevention of Violence against Children and Human Security", held in Slovenia in December 2006.

In Slovenia we are fully aware that children's well-being and schooling in all levels, the continuance of their educational path and better employment opportunities are of the greatest importance. This is the best assurance for the prevention of violence. In our country, children from 6 to 15 years of age are enrolled in compulsory primary school, while 90 per cent of young people from 15 to 19 years of age are enrolled in secondary school. Almost 43 per cent of the group between 19 and 24 years of age continue their education tuition free, while the poorest pupils and students are entitled to State scholarships.

Slovenia, along with the entire European Union, reaffirms its commitment to combat AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. It welcomes the activities of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to which Slovenia has earmarked funds in line with the Millennium Development Goals. We again acknowledge the important work carried out by UNICEF in creating awareness and increased access to information and services for young people.

We intend to pay special attention to the promotion of the rights of the child when we hold the European Union presidency in 2008. The European Union has recently adopted a new set of guidelines on children's rights that will guide our activities in the development of European Union foreign policy in this area.

Allow me to conclude by saying that all children have the right to a healthy and secure childhood. Only consensus and partnership among Governments, international organizations and civil society, as well as the participation of children at different levels, can ensure the effective implementation of the proposed solutions. Today's event offers just such an opportunity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Gyula Tarcsi, State Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs of Hungary.

Mr. Tarcsi (Hungary): The Republic of Hungary was one of the very first to join the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration of "A world fit for children", and we devote high priority to the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Our country makes every effort to realize the objectives of those documents.

Although our country is among the developed countries gauged by its per capita gross domestic product, the elaboration of the Millennium Development Goals was of great importance to us. The changes in our political and economic lives after 1989 generated challenges and tasks that correspond to the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. These include, primarily, the struggle against and prevention of poverty of children and families with children; ensuring the highest level of physical and mental well-being of children; and making quality education accessible for everyone.

In the meantime, we must also face challenges that are typical of developed countries, including an ageing population, a decline in the number of births and the mainstreaming of environmental concerns. We pay special attention to reducing inequality in opportunities in order to solve those complex problems, including through the reduction of gender-based wage differences; the improvement of the financial opportunities of those living in socially disadvantaged areas; and the provision of a fair present and future for our children.

As for that last objective, we place special emphasis on the treatment and prevention of violence against children, including domestic violence, peer violence or violence in the media, and on preventing children from becoming criminals and victims. Since 2000, the reduction and prevention of drug use has been a priority Government task. In that context, allow me to inform the Assembly that Hungary plans to ratify the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, possibly during the first half of 2008.

Since 2000, the parliament and Government of the Republic of Hungary have adopted several short- and long-term strategies, programmes and action plans based on these instruments for the protection of children and youth. The Government has also filed reports with the parliament every year since 1995 on the situation and the development of the living conditions of children and youth, as well as on measures the government has taken relating to these living conditions, and has provided reports every year since 2000 on actions taken to reduce the drug problem. The Parliament of Hungary adopted the National Strategy on Social Crime Prevention in 2003 and two-year action plans have been prepared ever since.

Three of the Government's five main priorities relate in a concrete manner to children. A National Health Programme for Infants and Children of the Republic of Hungary was prepared in cooperation with the European Office of the World Health Organization. In addition, a National Programme against Children's Poverty, adopted in 2007, contains short- and long-term objectives and an action programme, to help in a substantial way to reduce and prevent child poverty in Hungary.

In aligning Hungary with the statement of the European Union, allow me to assure the Assembly that the Government of Hungary is committed to supporting the efforts of the international community to enable the present and future of our children to actually be "A world fit for children". In order to lend more credibility to my words, allow me to inform you that I intend to sign an agreement with UNICEF leaders tomorrow, on behalf of my Government, in which we commit ourselves to financially supporting this agency.

The results of complex programmes become visible only later and, in the meantime, we must face many new challenges. However, difficulties may only be overcome if we continually keep our objectives in mind and do not consider our children as vulnerable little ones who cause problems, but rather as investments or indeed, opportunities for the future. It is up to us to shape the future of our children, and let us not forget that they shape ours as well. We must take further steps to ensure the rights of children and we must admit that our work will be more efficient and effective when we involve them in the decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Therefore, I think it is especially important that during the Children's Forum, held recently, the interested parties were given the opportunity to present their opinions.

Finally, I wish the Assembly further success in its work, hoping that all that we say here will contribute to the implementation of the Declaration adopted in 2002, with a view to the tasks still ahead of us, as indicated in the documents submitted by the Secretary-General.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Andriy Musiyenko, Deputy Minister of Health of Ukraine.

Mr. Musiyenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, Ukraine would like to align itself with the statement made by the delegation of Portugal on behalf of the European Union. We would also like to touch on some issues that are of special importance to our country.

Unanimously adopted in May 2002, the outcome document of the General Assembly's special session on children, "A world fit for children", committed Member States, including Ukraine, to special obligations in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is therefore very important to discuss the implementation process of that document, evaluate the progress made, consider the problems that have been identified and solve them.

The protection of children is an overall national strategic priority for Ukraine. The President and Government of Ukraine devote special attention to activities in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that connection, bearing in mind the Millennium Development Goals and the strategy of the outcome document, "A world fit for children", Ukraine has identified priority areas for activities in establishing favourable conditions in the lives and for the development of children in health care and the formation of a healthy lifestyle; combating HIV/AIDS; ensuring that children receive a quality education; protecting children from abuse, violence and exploitation; fighting the phenomenon of latchkey and street children; and overcoming poverty.

In order to achieve those goals, the State policy of Ukraine in this area for 2000 to 2007 has been designed to improve the juridical basis for protecting children, reforming the State system for caring for orphans and neglected children, enhancing social protection for poor families with children, developing a network of institutions working for the interests of children, enhancing the intersectoral cooperation of State authorities, enhancing the interaction of social organizations, improving State care in protecting children from violence and exploitation, and fighting HIV/AIDS.

Significant efforts have been made to achieve a host of Government reforms designed to improve health and establish favourable conditions for the lives and upbringing of children. As part of the activities, special attention has been given to the active integration of State policy into the formation of a healthy lifestyle for children and youth. Thanks to changes in legislation in Ukraine, a set of practical steps has been introduced to protect the rights of children, and there are certain positive changes in birth and mortality rates, through separate indices for child morbidity and maternal deaths.

The fight against HIV/AIDS is an important area in implementing at the national level the outcome document of the Assembly's special session on children. A basis for the strategy for fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ukraine is a comprehensive approach to solving the problem, set forth in a national programme to ensure the prevention of HIV infection and assistance to people with HIV and AIDS in the 2004-2008 period. We are carrying out a number of intersectoral and sectoral programmes designed to prevent the transmission of HIV from mother to child and to ensure medical and social assistance for HIV/AIDS-infected children. Unfortunately, in spite of all of those efforts the spread of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine is still of serious concern.

The Government of Ukraine is giving great attention to ensuring opportunities for children to receive a quality education. Existing legislation provides full mandatory secondary education free of charge and for all pupils at the lower grades to be given free meals.

Our country believes that it is extremely important to ensure that children are protected from abuse, violence and exploitation. Children in Ukraine have the right to protection against all forms of family violence, and work is under way to prevent or overcome the neglect of children. The social protection of children is regulated by a Ukrainian law on preventing family violence. The State provides the necessary help in preventing and exposing instances of cruelty to children and provides information on such instances for investigation by police dealing with the affairs of minors so that measures to stop the violence can be taken. In questions of protection from abuse, violence and exploitation, our country is actively cooperating with international organizations.

Ukraine considers the overcoming of child neglect and abandonment a priority task. The Government has established a programme for that purpose for the years 2006 to 2010, which sets out measures to prevent children being deprived of families and to provide a broader family environment for orphans and children without parental protection and an improved network of institutions for the social protection of children. Support for national adoption of the decision by the President and Government of Ukraine has been a strategic goal. In January 2005, a Ukrainian law was adopted to ensure a legal basis for the social protection of orphans and neglected children, and it has been implemented to secure a family environment for the children.

One of the key tasks of social and economic development in Ukraine is reducing the level of poverty. With a view to reducing the overall level of poverty, in 2001 a national strategy to combat poverty was adopted, along with a comprehensive programme to ensure its implementation, designed for the period to 2009. In particular, from 2001 to 2006, assistance was increased in accordance with the Ukrainian law on State aid to families with children, for instance, a one-time allowance at the birth of a child, help with child-rearing until the child reaches the age of 3, and help for single mothers and foster children.

Despite the successes in the implementation of the outcome document of the special session on children, the agenda still contains a number of problems requiring solutions. First and foremost is combating poverty, improving financial measures to improve the status of children, including their education and medical care, and social institutions that prevent the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Further efforts are needed to improve the legislation to fully combat child neglect and abandonment and to effectively combat child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography, and to strengthen the role of parents in bringing up their own children and to further develop a social system to help those in orphanages who find themselves in a crisis situation.

With a view to solving the many problems and in order to further implement the plan of action of "A world fit for children" and the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Ukraine has developed a new document that defines a State strategy to protect children — the national action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for the period to the year 2016. In accordance with that document, the Government's policy priority areas in the near future will be preventing HIV/AIDS, increasing access to quality education, fighting child neglect and abandonment, protecting orphans and neglected children, developing social services for children and families with children, and increasing activities at the local level to improve the status of children.

In conclusion, allow me once again to state the commitment of Ukraine to achieving the noble goals of the plan of action of "A world fit for children", of the Assembly's special session on children, and to meeting the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our country intends to continue to give necessary assistance to activities at the national level and to make its contribution to regional, international and global efforts in this area.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Yana Marečková, Deputy Minister and Director of the Human Rights Section of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic.

Ms. Marečková (Czech Republic): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Czech Republic on this occasion and to address this Assembly. It is very satisfying to see how many delegates have gathered here to acknowledge again the importance of children's rights and to reaffirm their commitment to build a world fit for children. I would like to use this opportunity to share with you our experience in achieving the goals of the special session on children.

At the international level, the commitment of the Czech Republic to protect the rights of children has been expressed by ratification of new international instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Further, the Czech Republic is preparing its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

At the national level, a number of important legislative and non-legislative measures have been taken in recent years. I would like to mention, for example, the law strengthening the social and legal protection of children, the law strengthening the protection of victims of domestic violence and the new education act. In many areas the Government adopted detailed policy documents, such as on the conception of care for endangered children and children living outside their own family, the National Action Plan on the Fight against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Children's Injuries, the National Programme for the Fight Against HIV/AIDS, and the Action Plan of Social Inclusion.

In June 2007, the Government adopted a new comprehensive policy on children and young people for 2007 to 2013. This document includes, inter alia, the cross-cutting themes from the declaration on "A world fit for children", ensuring first of all children's participation, healthy lives in a peaceful, multicultural society and the protection of the rights of children. The Government intends to involve representatives of regions, NGOs, schools and experts in the implementation of the policy. The main objective of the policy is to establish appropriate conditions particularly for the fulfilment of the family function, for the personal development of children and their education towards active citizenship, including participation of children in social and political life, support of healthy lifestyles and protection against negative phenomena.

As for the protection of the rights of children, the main objective of the Government policy is to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to evaluate its implementation on a regular basis. In respect of the participation of children in social and political life, the objective is to establish conditions for wide involvement of the young generation in public and social life, to support the formation of children's self-governing bodies and to encourage State and regional administrative bodies to extend and intensify mutual communication with children and their organizations. As far as children's health is concerned, the objective of the Government's policy is to support health prevention measures, to acquaint children with health risks and to help them develop skills important for maintaining and strengthening health.

Finally, the document also covers the area of children and sociopathological disorders, social prevention and integration. The objective of the Government's policy in this area is to systematically support all preventive activities and to help increase children's social competencies. The tasks resulting from this policy will be implemented by the relevant ministries. Concrete measures will be specified in plans of action for two-year periods. All ministries involved in implementing the policy will present an overview of their specific tasks and measures for each two-year period, together with an evaluation of their implementation. We believe that the comprehensive policy document and the subsequent two-year plans of action, together with other national measures, will contribute to the improvement of children's well-being in the Czech Republic.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Giva Roselyn Dete, Under-Secretary for Child Welfare of Zimbabwe.

Ms. Dete (Zimbabwe): Before my address, my delegation wishes to express its sincere condolences to the United Nations and to the families that lost their loved ones in the explosions that struck Algeria this morning.

It is with great pleasure that I address the General Assembly. Indeed, children are every nation's tomorrow and future. It is in recognition of that fact that Zimbabwe is among 155 countries that have developed national programmes of action for children to ensure coordinated implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am pleased to report the progress that Zimbabwe has made in its efforts to uphold the rights of the Zimbabwean child and, in the process, to build a Zimbabwe that is truly fit for its children.

In the promotion of healthy lives, Zimbabwe has scored tremendous successes in the reduction of child mortality, in spite of enormous challenges that include HIV and AIDS. The under-5 mortality rate decreased from 102 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1999 to 82 in 2005-2006. The infant mortality rate was reduced from

65 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1999 to 60 in 2005-2006. In immunization and vitamin A supplementation, Zimbabwe has achieved almost universal coverage. And today, more than three quarters of Zimbabwean households have access to safe drinking water.

In the provision of education, Zimbabwe has made tremendous strides and has achieved universal access to primary education as well as gender equality. In 2006, 97 per cent of children were enrolled in primary education, and the net enrolment rates for boys and girls are now equal. In the field of early childhood education and care, the implementation of the new policy popularly known in Zimbabwe as the "zero grade" has started to bear fruit, as reflected in the increase in the proportion of grade one children attending preschool from 49 per cent in 2002 to 64 per cent in 2006. The policy has established early childhood education as part of every primary school, and the teachers of the zero grade are qualified, having undergone a three-year training programme.

In the area of protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, Zimbabwe has continued to strengthen the policy and legal framework in support of the protection of children's rights. The recent adoption of the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 strengthens the country's resolve to protect its children from violence and abuse in the home. In October 2007, the Anti-Domestic Violence Council was established to spearhead the implementation of the Act under the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development.

Zimbabwe has always had a robust birth registration process. The latest demographic and health survey found that 74 per cent of children registered their births in Zimbabwe in 2005-2006.

Poverty, however, has remained a major challenge for Zimbabwe. As a result, some of our children have had to work and live on the streets. However, there are efforts in place to address that issue. For example, the city of Harare and authorities in other major cities have established task forces to move children from the streets to places of safety where they can be cared for.

In combating HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe has taken a lead in the Southern Africa region. The adult HIV and AIDS prevalence rate was 24.6 per cent in 2003, and recent surveys and antenatal care surveillance data indicate that it has dropped to 15.6 per cent in 2007. The scale of the pandemic, however, is still overwhelming. In Zimbabwe, an estimated 1.1 million adults are currently living with HIV and AIDS, 60 per cent of whom are women. Furthermore, an estimated 133,000 children are infected. Overall, more than one in seven Zimbabweans are infected, but only approximately 40 per cent of children have access to antiretroviral treatment. Tremendous gains have been made in expanding services related to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) throughout the country, with more than 500 sites providing comprehensive PMTCT services by 2006.

However, one of the greatest challenges is the estimated 1.3 million children who are orphaned in Zimbabwe, the vast majority of them as a result of HIV and AIDS. Those children are less likely than non-orphans to attend school and to have access to health care and other basic services. They are also more likely to have psychological problems and to be subjected to forced sex in adolescence, which increases their vulnerability to HIV.

In response, the Government has developed an innovative Programme of Support for the implementation of its National Action Plan for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children. Under the Programme, funds from various stakeholders are pooled which are used to finance civil society interventions aimed at supporting the country's most vulnerable children. Over the next three years, the Programme of Support is expected to benefit 400,000 Zimbabwean orphans and other vulnerable children.

These efforts to combat the effects of HIV and AIDS still require support from the international community, including critical support from the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It is sad, however, that Zimbabwe could not be considered for Round 7 of the Global Fund, because that would have enabled us to make much more progress in reducing the suffering of our people caused by the pandemic.

With regard to malaria control, the number of people suffering from malaria was reduced from 1.8 million in 2004 to approximately 1 million in 2006, which amounts to a 40 per cent reduction in the number of malaria cases. In the 17 malaria-prone districts in Zimbabwe, more than 80 per cent of pregnant women and under-5 children have been provided with treated mosquito nets and preventive medication.

However, in spite of those successes, Zimbabwe still has a lot of work to do in fulfilling its obligation to uphold the rights of all its children. Zimbabwe needs to continue empowering communities, families and children themselves to uphold those rights.

Nevertheless, the illegal sanctions against Zimbabwe and the isolation of our country have hurt the Zimbabwean child the hardest, particularly in the areas of nutrition, adequate medication for opportunistic infections, paediatric antiretroviral therapies, antimalarial drugs and poverty reduction in general. We therefore appeal to all those who love children, particularly members of the Assembly and the international community, to support our country in its efforts to build a Zimbabwe that is truly fit for its children.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Antonia Popplewell, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. Popplewell (Trinidad and Tobago): The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is pleased to be part of this high-level plenary meeting on children and expresses its support for the ongoing efforts of the United Nations in the protection and promotion of the rights of children. In 2002, Trinidad and Tobago joined other Member States in supporting the outcome document "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2), thus reaffirming our commitment to improving the lives of our children.

At the country level, Trinidad and Tobago has gone a step further by developing its own Vision 2020 plan, aimed at achieving developed-nation status by the year 2020. The Vision is built around five developmental pillars, the most pertinent of which, in this context, is nurturing a caring society, thus emphasizing the importance of the family as the foundation of a healthy society.

We are pleased to share with the Assembly some of the policies that we have put in place to facilitate the implementation of "A world fit for children". In 2006, Trinidad and Tobago completed its second National Plan of Action for Children, which serves as a framework for the implementation of the four priority areas of action outlined in "A world fit for children". Our revised national sport and youth policies provide a framework for particular strategies and actions aimed at the attainment of the objectives outlined in the outcome document. The Caribbean Youth Dialogue 2006 provided valuable resolutions that have been included in the expanded youth response of the Trinidad and Tobago National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS.

In addressing the issue of quality education, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on reform of the education system. Measures taken thus far include the following. We have adopted policies, plans and programmes for a restructured and decentralized education system from early childhood to adult education. We have established several new units to strengthen the school support services system. We have adopted the programme of the United States Agency for International Development "Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training" to improve reading levels through in-service teacher development and classroom intervention. We have reviewed the revised Education Act in order to, inter alia, ensure that a rights-based approach to education is reflected.

Early breastfeeding is now promoted at some of our regional hospitals, in compliance with UNICEF's Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. Comprehensive antenatal services are provided routinely and free of charge at public maternal and child health clinics throughout the country. Health screening services for the early detection of hearing and visual impairment among students enrolled in Government and assisted primary schools have been provided since October 2005.

A review of the children's legislation package has also recently been completed. The package is intended to bring children's legislation more into line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to provide a cohesive strategy for increased protection of the nation's children under the law.

Deliberate efforts have been made to expand and improve family support programmes providing social assistance and other forms of material support of which children are both direct and indirect beneficiaries. In addition, emphasis has been placed on expanding counselling services for children in need of special protection, strengthening intersectoral partnerships and raising awareness of children's rights.

Despite the progress made to date, there have been challenges in the areas of human resource availability, relevant training, facilities and service provision. In an attempt to address some of those constraints, we plan to increase the human and material resources and services in key social sector ministries and to promote special education through teacher training and other training programmes. The enactment of children's legislation remains a priority on the Government's agenda. We also intend to continue our efforts to educate the public on children's rights. With support from UNICEF, we recently completed the 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the findings of which are encouraging, particularly in the areas of poverty reduction, education, water and sanitation and HIV/AIDS management.

We in Trinidad and Tobago will continue to work steadfastly in our resolve to improve the experience of childhood for our nation's children. In closing, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago once again expresses its thanks for the opportunity to address this high-level plenary meeting on children. Trinidad and Tobago reaffirms its commitment to promote and protect the best interests of all our children as we strive to create a world fit for children.

The meeting rose at 9.10 p.m.